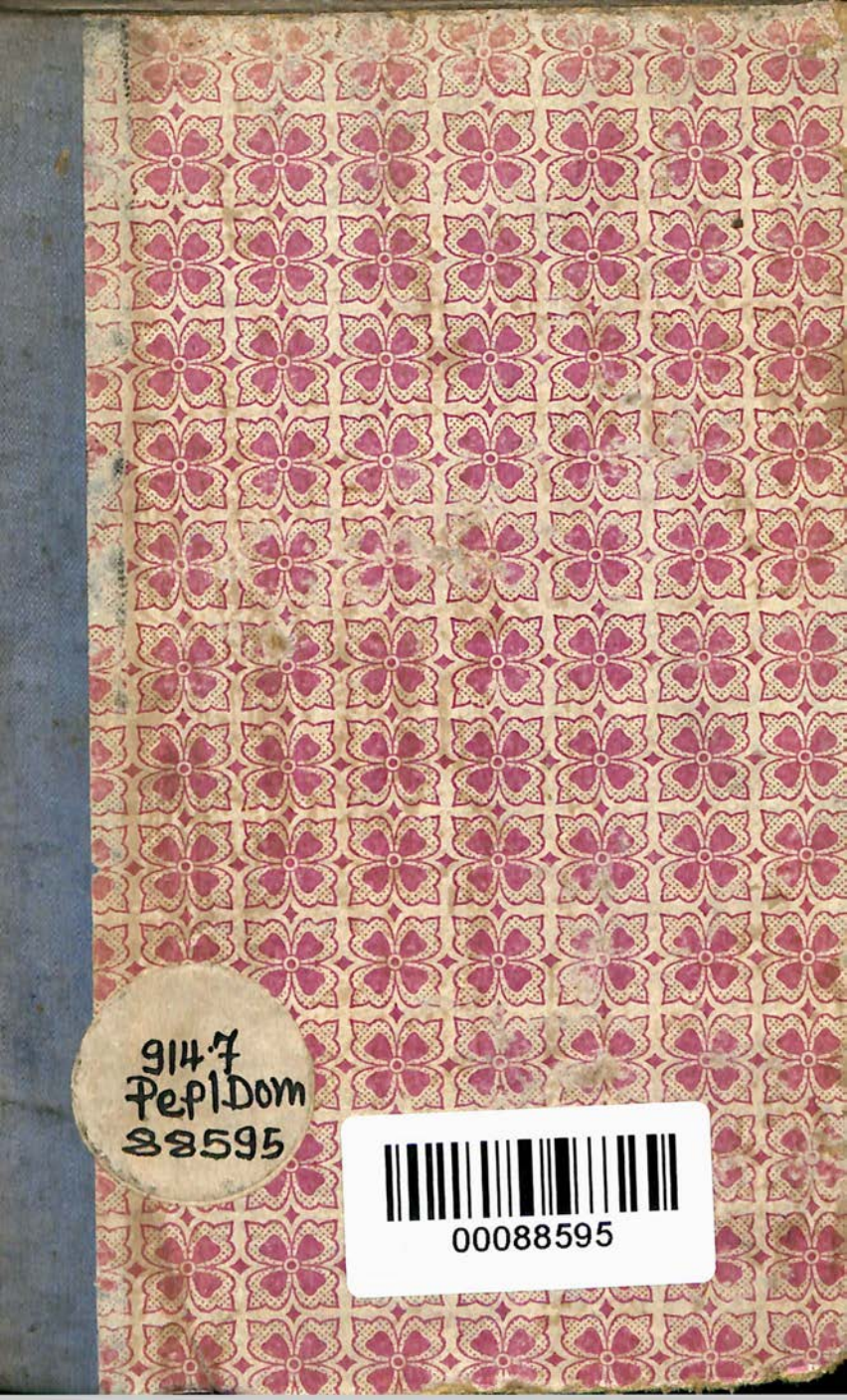
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OMESTIC SKETCHES IN RUSSIA.

BY

LADY CHARLOTTE PEPYS.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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DOMESTIC SKETCHES IN RUSSIA.

CHAPTER I.

"And so it was you who woke first, you say?" inquired in French a young lady, as she skipped out of her own little room into that of her sister's.

"Yes, I was awake a long, long time ago, and I saw the candles still burning and the sun shining."

"I don't believe it, Aimée."

"You may believe it or not, Nadine, but it's true. Why should I tell a story about it?"

"I don't know, except that it is your way to do so."

"Now I *know* that you were asleep long after I was. I heard you breathing."

"That was on purpose to make you think I was asleep—and I also heard you much louder—so—"

"That was Beauty," laughed Nadine, running out of the room, and coming in again with the said Beauty in her arms, the silky curly black coat of the pet contrasting well with the delicate white of her garments, and said, "If you *knew* I was asleep, why did you think of tricking me?"

"I didn't!" roared Année. "You tried yourself."

"Young ladies," said a harsh voice from behind a door, "you will each

learn a page of geography for this very improper conversation."

The accent was British undoubtedly, the tone cold and severe; it seemed to produce a certain effect upon the hearers—for Aimée pouted, hid her face in her pillow; and Nadine snapped her fingers, and kicked out her foot in the direction of the door whence it had proceeded.

In a few minutes the speaker emerged ready dressed, in a tight-fitting grey silk dress, with a cherry-coloured bow; everything about her was neat and orderly; her trim tall figure and large features, though neither dignified nor prepossessing, bore a stamp unmistakably British, and, by reason of a certain frigidity, were rather imposing.

She stood by the bedside where Nadine lay rolled up, apparently in a

heavy slumber; but so much was the lady accustomed to artifices of this kind, that she did not attempt to awaken the sleeper; she merely said, still more coldly than before,

"These lessons are to be learnt before church, or doubled, Mademoiselle Nadine."

Nadine feigned sleep.

"You hear me. And if you do not get up instantly you will hear more of this," continued the speaker as she passed out of Nadine's room into the school-room.

"Good morning, Miss Rodney," said a tall slight girl, rising from a desk and going up to the governess to take her hand.

"Good morning, Vera," said the governess coldly, and withdrawing her hand.

Vera, disappointed and chilled, returned to her desk, where she was busily engaged in drawing and colouring a map of Europe.

She looked anxiously after the governess as she went into the little room off the schoolroom where Aimée slept. She had herself been already several times into the room to beg the foolish girl to get up, and not sulk, knowing well how she would fare, if she did so, for the rest of the day. In vain did she try to attend to her lessons; she could not help listening to the voices that were now high in altercation.

"Voila encore! un jour de fête!" cried Aimée; "and I had a hundred things to do!—it's tiresome—horrible—abominable—lessons to-day!"

"Fête days are no fête days for

naughty children," said Miss Rodney, her tone becoming louder; "and so you shall find, Aimée. You shall just have your lessons doubled for daring to dispute with me."

"Fête days are always fête days here!" said the little girl, giving her governess a very unamiable glance through her affectedly half-closed eyes. I don't know English ways nor Welsh ways, and I don't want to know them. I am a Russian, and the daughter of a Russian, and I hate England and English people, and English fiddle-de-dees."

"You do, do you?" exclaimed the former; and forgetting that to personalities she ought to deign no reply, she gave Aimée three or four sharp slaps with her bony thin fingers.

Aimée spat at her in return, and

was condemned to a whipping as soon as her father should be at home.

In the meantime, Vera, hearing divers strange noises in Nadine's room, and fearing that all was not peaceful, in that region either, went to see what was the matter.

"Oh, Vera, I'm so cross!" began Nadine.

"So I see," replied Vera, kissing her, and glancing at various articles of dress and furniture thrown about the room. "How did your green slippers get up so high?" said she—"one on the pillow and the other on the top of the stove, and a red one here and a fellow one there; and oh, Nadine, the blue ones both in the snow!"

"I know," said Nadine, colouring, "but it's a fête day, Vera, it's the St. Anna,

and we are to learn lessons, and all because that old prig—"

"Hush, Nadine!"

"Well, that charming Englishwoman, then, heard me say that I was awake first, and Aimée say that she was."

"Was that all?" said Vera, looking at her.

"No, for Aimée began to embroider as usual, and I told her she told fibs, and then Mademoiselle Rodney scolded me."

"What has she given you to do?"

"A page of geography."

Vera laughed.

"You will soon learn that!" said she.

"Yes, if I don't get it doubled. But I pretended to be asleep when she was here, and then I threw about the

things directly she was gone, so she must know I was not asleep, for she heard everything. But I shall soon learn it," said she, brightening up.

"And enjoy the rest of the holiday. But make haste, for the bells are ringing for mass already; and I think, Nadine, it was to be learnt before mass."

She had been helping her sister to dress all this time, and now said,

"I must go now to my lessons; but, Nadine—"

"Well, what?"

"Do try to remember our promise to Hélène, and keep it."

"What was it? I forget."

"Do you really? She made us promise to obey Mademoiselle Rodney as herself, and to try to like her. She said that we were sadly alone," said Vera, her

voice faltering, "for we have no mother, and she is obliged to leave us; but that if we were faithful to our duty and obedient we should be kept from harm and grow up good—"

"Like her! I am sure *you* will," cried Nadine.

Vera coloured and sighed.

"We must try," said she.

To be like Hélène was the childish ambition of her young sister.

"Now come," said she, waiting for Nadine. The two went out together, and seated themselves at their lessons.

Aimée was on her knees on the floor sobbing, her pretty little face, swollen with crying, and Miss Rodney sitting opposite to her, looking very angry indeed.

Nadine, in obedience to a whisper

from Vera, went to her governess to beg pardon, and was really, for the moment, touched and humbled by the recollection of her sister's departure for St. Petersburgh, and of the solemn promise they had then made to obey her delegate.

"But to love her, how difficult!" thought she. "I am sure even Vera does not love her, though she is always thinking of what Hélène said."

Miss Rodney was speaking to Aimée, and Nadine, as she took up her position near the table and waited, fell into a reverie upon her governess's person and character, by no means favourable to her intention of begging pardon. She was startled by a sudden call.

"Nadine, what are you dreaming about?"

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Rodney," said Nadine, promptly collecting her senses, "for behaving ill this morning; but I was awake first, and I know my lesson."

"Say it, then."

It was repeated perfectly, and Nadine had fortunately looked out all the places on the map, so that there was nothing to be said. Yet she did not escape a scolding from her governess, which was certainly in this case not merited. Nadine, however, chafed and tapped her foot, and fidgetted all the time; while Aimée listened and whined, and whined and listened alternately.

Meanwhile, Miss Rodney's coffee was brought in, and Nadine turning suddenly round to give an order to the servant, upset not only the tumbler

which contained the dark aromatic beverage, but the hot cream also. These in a Russian house are trifling evils—for the boards are not spoilt, and coffee and cream are not there doled out in "portions." Miss Rodney's dress escaped, but not so poor Nadine.

"You unprincipled girl!" exclaimed her governess, "go and learn another page!"

Nadine declared she would not; and now not all the warning glances of her sister could keep her temper within due bounds; the veins in her face and neck swelled, she struggled for breath, then cast herself on the ground in an agony of rage.

"It never was so," she exclaimed, "while Hélène was here—you never dared to do it! Oh, Hélène! Hélène!" and

she wailed aloud for her sister. Vera, pale and trembling, came and placed herself before Miss Rodney.

"She is not unprincipled, indeed!—she did not mean to spill your coffee. Oh, do forgive her!—do forgive her! You know we are alone with you; we do mean to be good. We have no Hélène now."

And Vera sobbed also. Her voice broke down, and she could not go on. She turned to Nadine, and the two sisters wept bitterly for the absent one. And Aimée whined and listened, and listened and whined.

"Mademoiselle Vera," said Miss Rodney, coldly, "go to your room. What business have you to interfere? A pretty set of pupils I have indeed!"

Words to which she gave no utter-

ance rose to Vera's lips. A glance full of expression shot from her dark and beautiful eyes, as she fixed them upon her governess, who was perhaps touched by the silent remonstrance, for she said, hurriedly,

"Well, well, go to mass now, it's quite time—and then come back to breakfast. And Aimée, mind you tell no more stories by the way."

The three girls left her, and went to the chapel in the house, whilst she drank her coffee. We must hope that her conscience told her she had been hard upon those motherless girls, left completely to her mercy. Their father was absent, their sister away—perhaps for years—for her husband had just been nominated to an appointment which, in consideration of the interests of his own sons

and daughters, he could not refuse; and the poor girls' other sisters were all married and settled at some distance. They had never, moreover, been to them what Hélène had been, and Miss Rodney herself, under Hélène's rule, had been only a very active and strict governess, teaching well, but leaving character almost untouched. Now, however, that she found herself released from the ascendancy of a superior mind, she was not only severe and cold, but also irritating and harsh; and these young spirits, who were more or less suffering still from the loss of their sister and brother-in-law, with whom they had been on the most affectionate terms of intimacy, felt grievously the change which had taken place.

They had, to be sure, many brothers,

but they were dispersed; two were travelling, two were studying at Moscow, and one at St. Petersburgh.

These poor little girls had, therefore, no resource but in each other and in their governess; and we have seen how *she* spread her maternal wings over them.

Vera was now nearly fifteen, Nadine thirteen, and Aimée twelve; they were, therefore, all of an age to feel keenly any insult to their feelings, or any treatment wanting in consideration. Vera had been much with her elder sister, and resembled her closely in truthfulness and simplicity of character; but Nadine and Aimée had been in their infancy taught to deceive, and truth from their lips was not to be expected, if there was anything to be gained or avoided by a

falsehood. In Nadine this vice had been grafted on a disposition naturally frank, but Aimée had a sly and often affected manner that made the propensity more obvious, and perhaps less difficult to correct.

To Vera alone they seldom ventured to tell lies, for they saw that it greatly grieved her; and besides, she never said one word herself that was not true, though many other faults she had—for she was but a simple child of fifteen, with a very loving nature, early directed aright, and ever longing after that sister who had for awhile been taken from her.

As she knelt down before the altar and made the sign of the cross, she prayed for herself, and Nadine and Aimée. Then rising, she followed the

service to the end, and felt when it was over much refreshed.

There were a few trees near the door, and as she came out she sat down and folded her arm round Aimée.

"Aimée," said she, "I wish we could go to church the very first thing every day."

"So do I," sighed Aimée, "for then Miss Rodney wouldn't be there."

"No, but for another reason, Aimée. That if we thought of God the first thing we shouldn't do wrong."

"I didn't do wrong!" cried Aimée; "I didn't tell lies."

"Yes you did," said Vera, gently; "you said you were awake when the candles were burning and the sun shining. Now, I carried the candles into my room last night, because Miss Rodney

said she should require my map and my history before mass; so she left me the candles, and did not sit up at all."

Aimée looked ashamed.

"I know you did not mean to do anyone any harm," said Vera, "but just for the sake of contradicting Nadine you see how you have angered Miss Rodney — told stories, said impertinent things, and got Nadine into trouble. Is it not true?"

"Yes, Vera," said Aimée, "and I'm very sorry."

"Go and say so, then. I'll beg pardon for you, and perhaps you will not be whipped."

"I will try," said Aimée; "but it's of no use to try."

"God will help you if you ask Him.

Come back into the church—it is empty now—and let us all three pray for ourselves and Hélène."

On coming out again Nadine and Aimée kissed each other fondly.

Miss Rodney forgave Aimée so far, that she allowed her to escape whipping, but made her study all that day. Nadine and Vera sat indoors also, Vera wrote to Hélène, and Nadine to the sister whose *fête* it was—who was then in Paris.

At night, when Nadine and Aimée were asleep, each in her own tiny room and bed, Miss Rodney, who was busy at work in the schoolroom, heard a light step approach her, and, looking up, saw Vera.

"Miss Rodney, will you listen to me? I have much to say to you.

Forgive me, and pray do listen to me!"

"Well, what have you to say that has any sense in it?"

"I don't know if you think there is any sense in what I am going to say, but I would not say it if I did not think it true, and believe it with all my heart. Miss Rodney, do not be angry, but we all want to love you, and you do not let us."

That rigid dame could not believe her ears.

"You all want to love me, and I do not let you?" she repeated.

"Yes," replied her pupil, trembling, "we do. Héléne wishes us to do so—to obey you and to love you—and we try to do it."

"You do, do you?" sneered the lady.

Vera turned pale, but said nothing.

After a minute she went on in hurried and trembling accents:

"You know we are quite alone with you, now we have lost Hélène and mamma"—here her voice seemed entirely to fail her, but with white lips she continued, "and if you do not love Aimée and Nadine, perhaps they will forget how to love, and will grow hard and selfish."

"They have you," replied Miss Rodney, drily.

"But I am, like themselves, ignorant —I do not know how to love and teach, but you do, I suppose; and if you would get fond of them, and let them get fond of you, they would be better and happier — indeed they would."

"They have you," again responded the governess, heartlessly.

"But I am young, and I may be taken away," said Vera, earnestly; "and then, besides, I cannot do all I would with them. But if you would love them—"

"Why do you think I don't love them?"

A painful, forced smile curved Vera's countenance.

"I beg your pardon," said she, sighing, "I have no right to ask you this—only we are alone, and I am so afraid that if they are not loved they will get worse."

"And yourself, Mademoiselle Vera?"

Vera bit her lips.

"I am older; I shall not forget Hélène."

"Perhaps you are colder than your sisters."

"Perhaps," said Vera, swallowing down the feelings rising in her throat—"only, do love them."

"Upon my word," said Miss Rodney, suddenly getting red and angry, "upon my word, you are very impertinent, Mademoiselle Vera — always interfering with me, and presuming to lecture me, because I punish your sisters — as if Madame Hélène did not do so also."

"Oh, please don't speak of her!" cried Vera. "Of course she punished us, but she loved us also." And the poor girl tried to force down her rising tears. "I do not ask you not to punish us, only to love us also. But I beg your pardon for disturbing you. Good night."

And respectfully bowing, she was about to leave the room.

"Mademoiselle Vera, you will remain in your room three days for this."

"Very well, Miss Rodney; may I take my books?"

"Certainly, you will study as usual."

Poor Vera took her books quietly and retired into her own room, where she immediately threw herself on her bed, and cried bitterly.

All the events of this day and of many others, in which, since her sister's departure, their schoolroom life had been one of incessant scolding and strife, appeared before her. In this perpetual contention, too, between the governess and her pupils, there was no purpose to correct faults; for great ones were passed over, whilst trivial accidents

—such as spilling coffee—were called *unprincipled*, and punished severely: the whole demeanour of the cold-blooded, prim foreigner being at the same time repulsive and irritating in the extreme.

"Oh!" ejaculated the poor girl, "oh, we are very unhappy! It is not only her capricious severity—though an uncertain rule is the hardest rule in the world—but it is her coldness, her dryness, her want of affection, after having been used to Hélène. Yet Hélène is not a fondling person—she does not love caresses; but one felt that her love and justice were always there—could always be relied on—but now—now——"

These thoughts and feelings occurring so vividly to her, threw poor Vera into a state of great excitement, and she

became quite frightened at finding that her mind began to wander while she was wide awake. She tried to pray, but found herself mixing up her prayers. At last she became calmer, and fell into a profound sleep.

The next morning, when the ladies'-maid, Antonina, came into Vera's room, she was surprised to find her young mistress awake.

"Antonina," said Vera, softly, "take this little note to Nadijda Nicolaievna, and this one to Linbow Nicolaievna, as soon as they are awake."

"I hear, Vera Nicolaievna," was the reply.

It was a very wet morning. The snow was beginning to melt, and Antonina had, in the course of her morning duties, already been out in the court.

Her appearance was in consequence somewhat grotesque: she was a little slight woman, of about twenty, who would have been pretty had she not had eyes that seemed to avoid each other, and, though not squinting, looking to the right and left, too much to be pleasant. Her scanty petticoats were confined by a string round the waist, which, while it answered the purpose, looked very uncomfortable. Her thin legs were just seen where the petticoats were lifted, but only just seen, for they were immediately eclipsed in an enormous pair of jack-boots. Her head and shoulders were so completely wrapped in a shawl that little but her eyes and uncombed hair was visible.

She looked compassionately at her young mistress as she took the notes,

and promised to convey them directly. Vera then told her to bring her her breakfast in her room; and with another glance of compassion, Antonina left her.

Almost immediately Nadine entered in her night-dress, with the inevitable Beauty in her arms.

"Antonina says you are ill, Vera, and wish to see me."

"Antonina is mistaken, Nadine, dear. I am not ill, but I did want to see you. I am punished, and must not go out of my room to-day, so you will be the eldest in the schoolroom. And do —do try to be patient and good. You know you are so violent. How you threw yourself down yesterday! I wanted to say this before Aimée came here. Oh, do be patient!"

"Yes, yes, I will. But how can I, when she is so tiresome? But I shall come in to you, and we will have some fun!"

And Nadine danced about the floor, contriving, by some wonderful skill of her own, to hold her slight dress and her dog at the same time.

She certainly looked very pretty, and Vera, as she gazed fondly at her, wished she could always be as bright and smiling as just then: her dark hair, guiltless of night-cap, rolled in its own thick waves and curls, rough, but rich and fantastic, over her glossy shoulders; her well-formed legs and feet were in ceaseless motion and full of grace, her beaming black eyes laughed and danced too, her brown smooth skin was slightly flushed, a

bright red was on her cheeks, and her rosy mouth showed all its treasures of faultless teeth.

Aimée entering at that instant, she let fall Butinka and caught her sister round the waist; they instantly began a rapid waltz, and considering their attire, a prettier dance could not be seen. Russian girls in general dance and move with great agility and grace, and these children were particularly accomplished in bodily exercises.

Vera, forgetting her sorrow, felt almost ready to join them. She did sing for them, till all at once she recollected the probable consequences, and sent them back to their rooms, with many entreaties that they would be good, and neither quarrel with each other, nor be rude to Miss Rodney.

"But what are you punished for?" said Aimée; "you were punished the day before yesterday, and had to do lessons before daylight yesterday."

"That was for idleness, and this for impertinence."

"But you are never impertinent."

"I did not mean to be, Aimée; but you know one is sometimes led to do what one would not. Now go and *do* remember."

They slipped back to their rooms unperceived, and the first part of the morning passed quietly enough. They went to the great house to dinner, for there were many other persons, dependants of the family, and the detached wing in which the children had always lived was not large enough for such a reception.

Vera dined alone; she had busied herself all the morning in studying, and now began to feel very tired. She lay down on her bed, leaving her almost untouched dinner on the table, she gave herself up to the sad thoughts which had been repressed during the time of lessons.

When Miss Rodney came in to hear her repeat her lessons, which she did in the recreation hour, she immediately doubled them all, because she found her on the bed. Vera replied that her head ached. Miss Rodney either did not or pretended not to believe her, and repeated merely her former command.

Vera got up silently, and placed herself at her little table.

At this instant a loud quarrel was heard between Nadine and Aimée, and

Miss Rodney hastily returning, bestowed a score or two of slaps upon each of them, and a long lesson besides. Aimée's whimpering and Nadine's short, shrill outcry thereupon were heard in Vera's room, who sighed and thought to herself, "This was not Hélène's way; but everyone cannot be like Hélène — it would be foolish to expect it."

She tried then to give her mind to her lessons; and she succeeded, for they were promptly learnt, when she clapped her hands, and on Antonina appearing, begged her to tell Miss Rodney that she knew her lessons.

Miss Rodney however, did not appear.

Vera had finished all her duties. She sat waiting and waiting, holding her head in her hands, afraid to lie down,

because that luxury was forbidden, and yet quite unfit to sit up. At length her fatigue and exhaustion were so great, that sight and hearing almost failed her, and when Miss Rodney came in she neither saw nor heard her.

"Mademoiselle Vera, stand up, and repeat."

She rose, but immediately sank down again.

"Mademoiselle Vera, *stand up!*"

She rose again, and, holding by the table, tried to repeat her lesson. She began fluently, but suddenly her voice failed, all became dark before her eyes, and she fell back on the ground in a fainting fit.

Miss Rodney was very much alarmed, The doctor, the nurse, Antonina, all

were summoned; but their united efforts could only arouse the poor child from unconsciousness to a delirious fever.

A fortnight had passed before she was again at her desk, rather paler and thinner than usual, but quite recovered.

CHAPTER II.

VERA'S absence during her illness had by no means contributed to the comfort of Nadine and Aimée; they, poor girls, had, on the contrary, been very unhappy; for though Miss Rodney had been much alarmed at the consequence of her severity to the elder sister, she had not on that account been more tender with the two little anxious, trembling hearts subjected to her unfeeling rule.

Nadine had now recovered her spirits

and become wilder than ever, and Aimée more given to deceit and fibbing.

Stiffer, colder, and more repulsive than before, Miss Rodney, as if to take vengeance for the fright Vera's illness had given her, called the weakness and languor which still hung about the poor girl affectation, and taunted her bitterly with this accusation.

Vera was however, very glad to be considered well again. Her illness had been so dreary that she had none of the lingering regrets for its comforts and fond indulgence which are sometimes felt by young invalids, who have been kindly tended, and who are thereby unfitted for a time to bear a comparatively rough, every-day life.

Yet she was passing that disagreeable

stage of convalescence when, eager to be well, one feels one cannot get on quite so fast as is expected, and is unwillingly made aware that one is not thoroughly recovered, though all positive illness has passed away.

She knew that she was supposed to be able to do her lessons as usual, and she wished very much to be able to do so; but it took her a long while to copy out the "Peri's Song," and still longer to learn it by heart — and the three last stanzas of Lamartine's beautiful poem, "Le La," would not fix themselves in her memory. Her character of Louis XI. was begun again and again, and always took something of Miss Rodney's semblance.

At last the dinner hour arrived. Miss Rodney and her sisters went away —

Vera, tired and feeble, laid down to take a little rest.

Ere long the sound of footsteps roused her.

It was Aimée, sent to say that they should all walk out after dinner, and that Vera must be ready.

"Oh, I'm afraid I cannot go," said Vera, "I am so tired."

Aimée disappeared, and after dinner Miss Rodney came herself to fetch a parasol and to summon Vera. The poor child entreated to be left at home; but calling her affected and indolent, the governess refused to comply with her request.

It was fated, however, that they should meet the doctor, who was coming to see his convalescent patient, and who peremptorily ordered her back

to the house, pretending to scold her for having thought of walking out.

"You must await my orders before you do that, Vera Nicolaievna," said he.

And Vera Nicolaievna was very glad to be thus exempted from the projected walk.

Miss Rodney, swelling with indignation, moved off in search of Nadine and Aimée, whom she had ordered to go into the garden, there to await her arrival.

But these young truants were not to be found there. In vain did their irate governess call out at the top of her voice, and in every key, "Nadine! Aimée! Young ladies!" In vain did she make the garden paths echo under her rapid and angry footsteps, whilst

she herself panted under her heavy fur cloak.

There was no trace of her missing pupils, for the snow had disappeared, and the black earth was too hard to take the print of their steps, even supposing they had been in the garden.

"Surely," thought she, "they have not disobeyed my orders;" and coming home she sent servants in search of the children, while she warmed her feet at the stove, and scolded the absentees to poor Vera, who, of course, fancied that some evil had happened to them, and was in great fear. While all was in commotion, however, the two little girls walked in quietly, and sat down to their lessons, without saying a word.

"Where have you been?" inquired Miss Rodney, severely.

"Only waiting for you in the garden," replied Nadine; "and finding you did not come, we came home."

Aimée gave the same reply, adding,

"We never left the mulberry walk except to go down the lilac walk.

Of course they were not believed, and had a very just punishment, under which Aimée was impertinent, and Nadine rude as usual.

Late that evening they both came in their night-dresses to Vera, to confess that they had told a lie. They said that in the darkness they had thought of many things that she had said, and especially of her last whisper in saying, "Good night!—*do* tell the truth!"

Vera was already in bed, and hastily getting up, she begged them to go to Miss Rodney as soon as she should

come in from supper, and make the confession.

"Stay, however, one moment, Nadine," said she; "*where* were you?"

"In the cellar with Moise, where he keeps the apples and pears."

"Then you got some?"

"Yes, of course—that was what we went for."

Vera sighed and did not reply.

"Well," cried Aimée, "we had better go, and not wait till Vera has done sighing."

"Yes," said Nadine, "if you have nothing more to say, Vera, we will go. I wish you wouldn't look so old-womanish and stupid about a few apples."

And she left the room, hastily followed by Aimée; for they heard Miss Rodney's voice, and went to her in the

schoolroom, where they owned the truth, that they had seen Moise going to the cellar, and had followed him at first as a freak, afterwards to get apples; and had remained there when they heard themselves called, from fear of being punished. This fear also had led them to answer falsely when questioned.

Certainly these were great faults, occasioned by a very small one; but Miss Rodney, instead of regarding the confession as a good sign, and pointing out to them how easily, by want of frankness, and by cowardice, one is betrayed into falsehood, expressed her disbelief of the whole story, and threatened them with a punishment next day for being out of their beds at that time.

Nadine scribbled this on a little bit of paper and sent it to Vera, who

could scarcely, on reading it, believe such tyranny possible even in Miss Rodney; and was not surprised to find that the next time she urged Nadine to confess a fault, her sister refused to do so.

The three sisters became, of course, under this vicious rule, daily more unhappy — Nadine more violent, and Aimée more peevish and wilful; whilst Vera herself, losing all hope, felt less able to do anything well, and both for herself and her sisters was greatly discouraged.

One morning Nadine came to her and showed her a letter which she had written during Vera's illness to Hélène, detailing all their misery; but — slow at letter-writing, and unaccustomed to act for herself—Nadine had had this

valuable document so long on hand that the circumstances which had occasioned it, though not its angry feelings, were forgotten, and it was only on account of new grievances that she now produced it, and asked Vera if she should send it. It was a very simple production, but very touching.

As she read it Vera felt her eyes fill with tears. She told Nadine, however, not to think of sending it, as it would make Hélène so unhappy—"and what could she do for us?" asked Vera.

"What are we to do, then?" cried Nadine.

"Be patient and obedient, and remember that we are not forgotten; God is still near us, and means to make us better by every trouble great or small—only sometimes we set ourselves against

being made better, Nadine. But nothing comes by chance, and it is our fault if we let anything make us worse instead of better."

"Oh, I hope we shan't, I hope we shan't!" sang Nadine, dancing out of Vera's room into the schoolroom, her letter in her hand, and coming full tilt against Miss Rodney, who was just approaching to call her pupils to their lessons.

"Young ladies, it is thr—"

The "ee" was lost in the clatter of the governess's teeth. Nadine was not heavy, but she came so opportunely against Miss Rodney, that she sent that respectable spinster like a shuttlecock some paces back into the room.

This was certainly very disagreeable; but Miss Rodney quickly recovered her-

self, and said in her coldest tones, regardless of Aimée's shouts of laughter,

"What is that letter, Mademoiselle Nadine? Show it to me, if you please."

"It is to Hélène," replied Nadine, withholding it.

It had been expressly stipulated that the children might write to Hélène without showing their letters to Miss Rodney, who was authorized to read and correct their correspondence with anyone else.

Nadine, profiting by this exception, which gave her now a good opportunity of provoking her governess quite safely, refused to show her the letter, taking care not to tell her that it was not to be sent.

She stood still holding the letter high

above her head, her bright face full of mischievous daring; whilst Aimée, who delighted in joining in any mischief, especially in a skirmish against the foe of all days and hours, exclaimed,

"Oh, no, we never show our letters to Hélène!"

"Show me that letter!" persisted Miss Rodney, "or I will make you remember this."

"What will you do?" asked Nadine, who, with all her sorrows as she thought them, was wonderfully bold.

"What will you do?" chimed in the little repeater, in her pert tone.

"Mademoiselle Nadine, show me that letter! You will not? Very well!"

Miss Rodney then sprang upon Nadine, wrestled with her, and, getting her down, gave her one or two violent

blows. Nadine threw the letter away—Aimée caught it, whereupon Miss Rodney seized her also, and wrenched the paper out of her hand. It dropped on the floor, and was instantly and quietly picked up by Vera, who, hearing the noise, had come in from her room; but the excited governess, thinking Aimée had it still, insisted on her delivering it up.

"Miss Rodney," said Vera, "I have the letter, but I cannot give it to you. It is not to be sent, therefore it does not signify; but you know we are to write to Hélène privately."

Too angry to listen, Miss Rodney gave Aimée several sharp slaps, to make her surrender the note, and then administered to her a box on the ear, that sent the poor child reeling across

the room. Vera caught her, and placed herself before her.

"Miss Rodney," said she, "you forget! Aimée is not wrong now; she has not the letter—I have it: and you are treating her unjustly. Yes, and Nadine too," said she, "for we are allowed to write to Hélène without showing our letters."

"If you have the letter give it to me!" cried Miss Rodney.

"I cannot give it to you," said Vera —"it is not mine; though, as it is not going, it is of no consequence. But *you know* that our letters to Hélène are not to be opened — that is a special rule."

"You have not got it," said Miss Rodney, "Aimée has it. Aimée, come here!"

Aimée went to her. Miss Rodney searched all her clothes, and then, not finding the letter, told her she should have nothing but dry bread all day for impertinence.

"Here is the letter," said Vera, showing it; "since you will not believe me, I must show you that I have it."

"Give it to me!" demanded the governess.

"I cannot," replied Vera.

The most angry words and epithets were hereupon heaped on Vera: she was told that she made her sisters ten times worse than they would otherwise be; that she was mutinous, affected, hypocritical, and a disgrace to Hélène.

All the rest Vera had borne patiently, but when this last taunt was uttered, the colour left her face, she drew her-

self up proudly, and said in a low, concentrated tone,

"I am not worthy of her. But how *dare you* speak of her?"

For this speech she was again ordered to remain three days in her room, and this time without seeing her sisters.

Vera heard the sentence without complaint, but Nadine burst into tears; Aimée whimpered in concert, and Miss Rodney proceeded to administer several sharp taps on Nadine's fat bare shoulders, when Vera stepped between them and caught her hand.

"Scold me," she exclaimed, "but why do you strike Nadine now? She cries because I am punished. That may be foolish, but it is not wrong."

Nadine, however, soon put herself in the wrong, for she spat on the floor

in the direction of the governess, and made a pirouette round the spot, as if to call attention to it.

"Bells! Bells!" cried Aimée at this moment, springing up and running to the window; "oh, who is it?"

Vera's heart beat high, but she did not speak. She fixed her eyes also on the window; her colour came and went. At last she exclaimed, "Adrien!" and rushed out of the room, followed by Nadine and Aimée.

It was their brother, who had been travelling in Europe, who had returned; and all their griefs were forgotten as they hung upon him, and were fondly kissed and caressed.

"Ha, ha!" said he, "so you are glad to see the mischievous boy again, are you? What, Vera, what are all these tears for?"

"Because I am so happy!" said Vera, trying to smile.

"Oh, Adrien," began Nadine, "do you know how—"

But Vera stopped her, and asked when he was going.

"A hospitable question," said Adrien, laughing. "Well, then, I am off to St. Petersburgh, to study there before entering the Guard; and I have only time to see you, take a bath, look at the old place, eat, sleep, and start off again. Stay, I have something more to do. I must see Miss Rodney, and unpack my treasures. Come with me."

So saying, Adrien, followed by his sisters, went to the room where he had left his valise, and then proceeded to display from among its contents various costly trinkets.

A pretty ring was slipped on Vera's finger, a charming locket delighted Nadine, and a little cross and chain enchanted Aimée.

While these happy girls were thanking their affectionate brother, a peremptory voice called to Vera and desired her to return instantly to the room she had left.

Adrien then opened the door, saluted Miss Rodney with a profound bow, invited her into his apartment, rattled on in an off-hand conversation for some five minutes. He remarked that Vera looked thin and the other girls pale, but this he ascribed to the weather, especially to the sudden breaking up of the ice.

This good-humoured talk would have put anyone else in a good temper, or

at least would have cooled down angry feelings, but Miss Rodney, finding no opportunity to make her complaint, grew more and more irritated, and at last burst forth in words of suppressed anger.

"M. Adrien, will you be so good as not to detain the young ladies any longer; they must accompany me to their schoolroom directly."

"May they not stay a little with me?"

"No, they have behaved too ill."

"Vera also?"

"Vera is the worst of all."

"May I come and see them?" asked he, with a half funny, half penitent look.

Miss Rodney knew not how to refuse.

"They have lessons to learn," replied

she, shortly; "and Vera must keep her room."

"Do forgive her this once: I am only here for a few hours. Do let us all be together for so short a time."

Vain was every entreaty. Miss Rodney only repeated again and again that if her pupils had asked her leave to see their brother she should not have refused, but now, &c., &c.

In vain did Adrien plead the suddenness of his return, and the length of his absence from home.

Finding that he could make no impression on Miss Rodney, he went away, disgusted and mortified, to his bath.

While his servant, however, was whipping him with oak twigs, it seemed as if the naughty boy was being whipped

out of him, and a bright idea occurred to him. The Englishwoman, he thought, had a gastronomical cast of countenance—an expression betokening a full appreciation of good eating.

"I will," said he, "invite her to dine with me—this will surely mollify her wrath."

It had at least the effect of soothing his own; or perhaps it was that calming, refreshing, invigorating process of taking a Russian bath, that had made him as quiet and amiable a gentleman as anyone would wish to see.

He wrote and despatched, whilst in this mild mood, a delicate little note to Miss Rodney, requesting the favour of her company, and that of his three sisters, at dinner immediately.

On arriving in the dining-room, he

found only Miss Rodney, who apologised for the absence of the young ladies by saying that they did not deserve the indulgence he had requested for them.

"Do you?" thought he; but he only said to a servant,

"Tell the young ladies I await their presence to sit down to table."

Presently Aimée and Nadine appeared.

"And Vera?" asked he.

"She says she ought not to come," said Nadine.

"And she begs you will not ask her," said Aimée.

Miss Rodney looked ready to die of rage.

"Aimée!—Nadine!" said she, "go back directly, and do not presume to sit down to table."

"*We* do not dine without them," said Adrien. "Aimée—Nadine, go into the next room."

They obeyed him.

"Now," said he, as soon as they were gone, "just consider, Miss Rodney, for two minutes whether it is worth while to make so much ado about so small a matter. I am here for a few hours only; let me enjoy my sisters' company, and let my poor little sisters enjoy mine. You really cannot wish me to compel you to allow this."

The young fellow spoke in an easy good-humoured way, that yet showed he was quite in earnest.

Miss Rodney remained silent.

It is not fair to say that the dinner smelt appetizing—that she was hungry, and recollected that if she did not let

the children share the feast she could not partake of it herself. Perhaps she was wise enough to doubt the advantage of any further discussion. However this may be, she succumbed, and calling in Nadine and Aimée, told them they were allowed to remain, to oblige their brother.

"And Vera?" said her brother again.

"She will not come—I know her," said Nadine.

"Oh, no—she will not come," chimed in Aimée.

The dinner over, Adrien begged his guests to excuse him for a moment, and he went across the court to Vera. He tried to make her confess that she was unhappy; but she was very unwilling to appear so, and led him to

speak of other things—his travels, &c. She gave him a letter for Hélène, and after a short but affectionate interview they parted.

On leaving her he met Miss Rodney at the door.

"I will send you Nadine and Aimée directly," said he; and joining immediately those very communicative little persons, he drew easily from them all he wanted to know, kissed them, sent them home, and started once more for St. Petersburgh.

CHAPTER III.

THE incident recorded in the last chapter tended still further to widen the breach between Miss Rodney and the children; Nadine especially, with her impatient temper, chafed against the cold rule of her governess; Aimée copied her, and between them Miss Rodney's life was rendered very nearly unbearable. Vera became so utterly spiritless that nothing interested her: she could be roused indeed, by any cruelty to her sisters, but on herself

suffering seemed to make no impression. Still she tried to teach them to regard their own conduct in its true light, owning that they were at least as much to blame as their governess. But as this was all that could be said, they were all very unhappy, and there was no prospect of any change for the better.

Weeks passed on; the breaking up of the ice or thaw had taken place late in April. It was now near the end of May: the weather was warm, sunny and delicious, and the children began to enjoy summer hours and pursuits. One day, when they were all going to the woods, Nadine not having finished her lesson, and having committed some other slight fault, was condemned to remain locked up in the school-room. To lock up Nadine, how-

ever, was no easy task; though the sashes being still all doubled, it might seem that the prison was secure; yet the family carriage was hardly out of sight when Nadine's lithe little form was hanging outside the window. She had forced open the one little pane that served as a ventilator, and was preparing to descend, when she espied the herd of thirty-six cows and two bulls, with their attendants, coming as usual into the court; she therefore hastily sprang to the ground, to avoid being seen. The animals were all in front of their conductors, and thus screened her from view as she crept round the low detached house, into which she hied, and then made towards the garden. The old dairy-woman was at her post looking out

for the cows, but she would not know nor care much about Nadine's appearance. Two boys who were near an old archway were much more likely to observe and report her movements; but they were at the moment engaged in drawing water for two of the girls employed on the farm, who stood, with their naked feet and legs, their scanty petticoats of coarse brown cloth, their heads decked with the ribbon, which, like the Scottish snood, denotes the maiden—the fair hair of the one and darker locks of the other falling in irregular clusters round their faces,—talking and laughing, shewing their black eyes and white teeth, and coquetting beautifully with their rustic urchin admirers.

Nadine crept guiltily by, without being seen by any of the four. Just, however,

as she was leaving the court she heard a voice say,

"There, there is one of the young ladies, ask her."

Immediately there approached Nadine a lanky girl, of about nineteen, who was generally one of the embroideresses of the establishment, and rejoiced in the name of Zenobia. She was anxious to obtain leave to go home on the next day, and to be allowed a train for the purpose, for her home was distant twenty or thirty versts. She hoped Nadejda Nicolaievna would kindly request the intendant to let her have one.

Nadine told her to speak to Vera Nicolaievna; her voice died in her throat as she said so, and added, that she was not the right person, not being the eldest at home. Zenobia then kiss-

ing her hand, and receiving a kiss on the forehead in return, withdrew.

Nádine had still to pass the kitchen door, where there were always collected the idle and the gossips, and she much feared being noticed. Certainly it was beyond her hopes to find the door open, but she was not to escape so easily. As she passed under the window she heard the cook, Boris, exclaim,

"Why, there is Nadejda Nicolaievna, I thought my Barishnie were all out in the woods. Nadejda Nicolaievna," said she, following her, "what will you be pleased to order for supper to-night?"

Nadine trembled, but she retained her presence of mind.

"Chicken cutlets," said she, "or crapaudine, and some serniki—only let them be as good as they were last night."

Serniki, be it understood, are small, flat rounds of new cream cheese and paste mixed together, fried in butter, and eaten with or without sour cream. They are excellent, and about as large as the foot of a wine-glass, and seven or eight times as thick.

Nadine then wished to proceed, but Boris had not done.

"I thought," said she, "that all my young ladies were, on this fine day, in the woods?"

Nadine looked at him.

"Ah! but I am punished, Boris," said she, quietly. "Let the supper be ready when they come back, at seven o'clock."

Certainly she was very composed, this little rebel; there was really the making of a fine character in her. She had many excellent qualities, but, like many

other children, had unfortunately imbibed from childhood the idea that subjection to rule was always to be evaded or neglected. Even in Hélène's time she had been a refractory little personage, and in her absence turned out frequently quite a plotter of rebellion.

She now quietly walked on into the garden, chafing and fuming inwardly at her punishment, and going over in her mind the whole course of her life under Miss Rodney. She grew more and more indignant every moment, and worked herself up at last into a state of rage that was really ridiculous—though necessary, perhaps, to give her courage for the escapade she had in view. Whilst in this pretty frenzy she saw, under a mulberry tree, the tar-smelling rough garments of the little boy whose business it was in the

winter to heat the stoves, and in summer to carry water. Absent now on the latter duty, he had left his outer coat and his jack-boots under the tree.

Nadine put her dainty little feet into the boots, settled the cap on her dark locks, put on the tarry coat, and walked off.

She soon gained the hedge which separated the garden from the village, and having picked out of it a stout stick—for the dogs in the hamlets are often very furious—she pushed through the prickly fence, and was on her feet in the road. On her feet, but without one of her boots, which had dropped off; she had only just time to conceal her fat little leg and pretty shoes in their enormous case, when some travellers came by.

"What a beautiful boy under that hedge!" said one.

"Yes, but he looks mischievous," replied the other.

"A boy, a boy!" said Nadine to herself—"then I am well disguised," and she proceeded on her way.

She had not gone far before a voice called to her over the hedge, and asked if she had met Nadejda Nicolaievna in the village.

Feigning a rough voice and the *patois* of the district, she replied, without looking at the servant who spoke,

"No, why do you want her? Shall I look for her?"

"Do," replied the other, "and tell her that some visitors are arrived: Dmitri Georgevitch and Tais Georgevna and Ta Dmitrivna,"

"Very well," replied Nadine, and the servant disappeared.

Her heart smote her a little. These visitors were relatives of Hélène's husband, and she was very fond of them. Dmitri was a young widower, and Ta, his only child, fondled and petted by her very small Aunt Tais, at this time about twelve years old, and a great friend of Nadine. As, however, she was anxious to persevere in her undertaking, she walked on, and on, till she was long past the village; and by the time she had reached another, also belonging to her father, she heard the sound of carriage-wheels.

It struck her then immediately that she might be on the very way to meet her sisters and their governess.

But, then, thought she, they could

never be on their return so soon. However, she hid herself behind a tree till they were nearly out of sight. She then ventured to sit down and rest, and fell, poor child, into what she thought profound reflections on her position and projects. The result was, that she resolved to find her way to Moscow, and to go thence by railway to St. Petersburgh, to complain to Hélène—of what? There was, in fact, nothing particular to complain of on this day—for, except the indignity of being locked in, her punishment was not a severe one. No, it was the opportunity, far more than the pretext, which had prompted her flight; and, like many other rebels, especially young ones, she could not resist the pleasure, in anticipation, of being able to state and expatiate on

the griefs over which her young heart every day so angrily brooded.

As she sat pondering over her wrongs, and the wrongs of Vera and Aimée, she got so excited, that the mission she had taken on herself appeared very heroic, and she thought that Hélène would receive her quite as a heroine, who had devoted herself to great sufferings for the sake of others.

Descending a little from these childish delusions, she opened her little purse and counted its stores: it contained five roubles. This she thought she would economize till she reached Moscow, when it would suffice to pay the railway-ticket to St. Petersburgh. She knew little, poor child, of the nature of her undertaking; but she had heard of people starting with less to go far-

ther; and in fancy she saw herself a Prascovia, reaching her destination, and accomplishing her purpose. Pleased with the idea, she went on to fancy Vera's reception of her on her return home; "for," thought she, "I should not like to die, like Prascovia, before reaching home—I had rather see the end of it all!"

Another carriage now approached her, and so absorbed was she in her thoughts that she did not hear it until she was called.

"Man, boy! come here and put that bit of harness straight, will you?" cried the coachman and Vacili at once, Vacili at the same time putting on the drag, for there was a steep descent before them.

Nadine rose up, and tried to obey, but she was too short.

"Eh, eh?" said the coachman, "what a little mite it is! There, go then and help at the drag, and Vacili will put the harness right."

As she passed along beside the carriage to reach the drag, her heart beat fast. Vera and Aimée were in this carriage, and she dared not look at them, nor at Miss Rodney, who was, she supposed, there also. Aimée, who had heard the remark of the coachman, leant over the side to catch another glimpse at the very small boy now struggling with the drag.

Vacili was still there, and Nadine dared not look up. All at once he dashed her hand rudely away, saying,

"What's the use of a boy with such small white hands? Get along, you'll

never get your bread with those hands."

Nadine forgot, and looked up at him, surprised.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Aimée, "what a pretty boy! I declare he is quite like Nadine!"

Vera tried to look, but the boy was already retreating.

"Call him back," said Aimée, "and give him something."

"No, no," said Miss Rodney; "let us get home as fast as we can, my head burns. Vacili can give him five kopecks, and overtake us."

Vacili was intrusted to do so, but the little urchin had already disappeared entirely.

"Oh, he's affronted, is he?" cried the servant; "very well, then, he may do without his twenty kopecks." He said

this aloud, thinking that the child was only sulking, and would appear at this bait.

But Nadine was more alarmed at the risk she had run than offended.

She was indeed hidden behind a hedge, but was struggling with her tears, and had neither voice nor wish to reply.

At length the servant disappeared, and she ventured to look out. The carriage was already growing small in the depths of the defile.

Vacili was still far behind it, but too far off to see her. She therefore boldly walked on in an opposite direction.

"Why," thought she, "are they coming home so soon?"

But this thought soon passed from her mind, and oddly enough the idea

of the good supper they would find ordered by her made her laugh.

A moment afterwards it made her feel very hungry and tired.

She had been walking for about two hours, and now there was not a cottage in sight.

But she knew that a little further on there would be a village, and she hastened on.

Before long she came to a thick wood. Now Nadine had heard, all the winter, stories of Taranenko, the brigand, who had infested the country—had been captured fourteen times, and had always escaped, even from Siberia; and for some months past she had firmly believed that every strange man who had entered the court of her father's house was this brigand disguised.

It is therefore not very surprising that the budding woods, with all their leafy coverts, which she so longed to visit with her sisters a few hours before, now awoke in her only images of terror, which every moment contributed to increase, until at last she was half wild with fright.

With infinite relief, therefore, she heard the creaking of a cart behind her. This sound at least gave her no fears—she felt that there was some one at hand who was not a brigand.

When the cart overtook her she asked the driver to let her sit in it for a little way, as she was very tired.

The good man consented.

He eyed her at first rather curiously, and at length said,

"Where are you going?"

"A long way," she replied, "on business."

"On business!" laughed the man—"at your age!"

"Yes, on business for Nadejda Nicolaievna," replied she, gravely.

The man took off his hat.

"Have you walked all this way from Garasavka?" asked he.

"Oh, yes," replied she, "and shall go much farther to-night."

"Go with me in my cart, then," said the man, "if you are on business for Nadejda Nicolaievna. I am going as far as Tenevka, if that will suit you."

"Do you go all night?" asked Nadine, timidly.

"No, my little fellow," said he, "I sleep at my house at Ivanov to-night, and to-morrow I go on to Tenevka."

Nadine made no reply. She appeared to be thinking.

At last she said,

"I do not know for certain if my road goes by Tenevka or not, but I know the look of the road, and if you will allow me I will get out there."

"Are not you sleepy?" said her protector.

"No," replied she, "but I am hungry —shall we soon reach some place where I can buy some bread?"

His only reply was to hand her some black bread and two onions.

Luckily for the little Russian girl, she had often partaken of this coarse fare with pleasure."

"Eat, eat!" said he, "and never talk of buying as long as you are upon the business of Nadejda Nicolaievna, and on the lands

of Nicolai Anatolavitch. He is a good master to us all."

This was quite true. The first rumours of emancipation were floating in the air, but not one of the peasants of Nadine's father thought of revolting against his proprietorship.

Nadine had heard enough about popular feeling to be much touched by this, and there was a certain trembling in her voice in the few words she said in reply, which would have told a keen ear that she was not a mere messenger.

When she had eaten she felt sleepy, but her boots embarrassed her, yet she dared not pull them off, lest her embroidered drawers and delicate shoes and stockings should denounce her. Her hair, not longer than it is often worn by peasant boys, was moreover concealed by the cap

she had borrowed. But she was continually afraid of her coat opening and showing her frock and petticoats.

At last the carter looking at her said,

"I do not know why a boy, be he ever so young, should speak with that voice."

"But perhaps I am not a boy," said Nadine, hastily.

"Why are you in boy's clothes, then?" asked he.

"Tak, tak!" cried Nadine, "when one has not all one wants, one is glad to borrow. I was cold this morning."

The driver, a very phlegmatic individual, said no more. Nadine managed to sleep without drawing off her boots, and slept many hours. She was so tired that the jolting of the cart did not disturb her.

It was nearly midnight when that vehicle suddenly stopped, and Nadine awoke. She was lifted out and carried into a small warm house, ill-lighted by one wretched little candle. The children of the family were all asleep on the stove. The man told his wife all he knew about Nadine, and she, giving her a glance of sharp inquiry, set before her a piece of brown conrgik, a kind of biscuit, not harder than Scotch scones, and thickly strewed with poppy-seeds. These cakes are as large round as a cheese-plate, and twice as thick as an Abernethy. The stove was out, but it is never cold in a Russian house, and the children who slept on it, awakened by the smell of frying fish for the traveller, asked for food.

Nadine ate some cachia and drank

some quass, a liquor made of black flour fermented. She was then desired to lie down on the stove among the children.

She did so, and soon afterwards the parents took their usual place also.

A Russian stove is generally so contrived as to be at the same time a bedstand; it is not usually very high, or if it is high it has two parts, one low and wide, and the other more elevated. It always forms a prominent object projecting from the wall of the room, and generally goes into two rooms. Being constructed of brickwork or masonry, the heat it gives is very diffusive, while the surface is seldom overheated, as is the case with iron stoves.

But Nadine, used as she was to Russian stoves, had never slept upon

one before; and she was so amused by her position and so refreshed by her sleep, that she was not even drowsy; she heard, therefore, the drover's wife say,

"What do you think of your traveller? Do you believe her story?"

"Yes," answered the good man, stupidly.

"I don't," said his wife; "believe me, she has nothing to do with Nadejda Nicolaievna; she is some little scapegrace run away from home. But you're such a simple fellow! Did you even ask her name?"

The simple fellow confessed that he had not thought of it.

"How is it you did not know sooner that she was not a boy?" asked his wife, contemptuously. "However, she *must*

have known that you took her for one by the way you spoke. Why did she not tell you before?"

"I asked her that," said he, delighted.

And then he began once again the whole history of their meeting and journey, during which the wife fell fast asleep, and he soon followed her example.

Nadine, roused by their conversation, was in no danger of sleeping. She watched her opportunity, and when all the sleepers were fast locked in heavy slumber, she stepped down quietly to the floor, took her boots in her hand, and prepared to leave the house. The door was not barred, and she easily got out.

It was early morning; a dim grey light threw a veil of indistinctness over

all objects, and all around looked exceeding dreary. Little Nadine felt very lonely. However, she knew that she had nó time to lose; that probably there would be some search after her, though she had not forgotten to leavė on the table a piece of thirty kopecks.

She tripped onward, therefore, very courageously; the long sleep and her supper had refreshed her, and she only waited to be some way out of sight of the cottage, to kneel down and pray for the success, poor child, of her mission.

She was now beyond her father's domains, and less afraid of being recognized. The sun had risen. It was scorchingly hot, and she longed to take off her heavy disguise, and walk on clad as usual. But this would not be

prudent; for anyone, she reflected, would in that case be surprised to see a little girl, dressed as she was, walking alone; and perhaps some one might then try to rob her, or to make her a prisoner, and send her home.

Nadine walked on and on, till it was nearly noon; she was very very tired, and had lain down upon a bank to rest, when she heard the trotting of a pair of horses.

Too tired to care much what it might be, she closed her eyes.

"Ha! ha! my little guest, have I caught you?" exclaimed a voice, and two large hands seized and lifted her into the cart. It was her friend of the night before.

"What did you run away for?" asked he roughly.

"I did not want to give you any more trouble," replied Nadine.

"Had you thought to get off by paying me thirty kopecks? Too much for such a supper, and a bed that you did not use," said he, gruffly; "besides, I told you you were not to pay, because you were sent by Nadejda Nicolaievna. I daresay, now, that is not true."

"It is quite true," said Nadine. "Shall I swear?"

"No, no, your word is enough. There, lie still, and tell me when you see your road."

Nadine lay still, and thought the command very agreeable; for she was afraid that this good man might proceed to other questions, which would be rather embarrassing, as to her identity,

and therefore determined to recognize her road very soon.

The great fatigue, however, she had already undergone made her sleepy and indolent; and it was not until the driver said,

"Now we leave the great road to Jitomir and turn off to Teneoka—we shall soon be there now."

"Thank you," said Nadine, "I will get out here."

So saying, she tried to give him fifty kopecks, but he put them away, threatening to complain of her to Nadejda Nicolaievna. This so tickled Nadine's fancy, that she went off into a fit of laughter; and the good old man looked at her and laughed also, instead of helping her down.

"Come," said he, when she was on

the road, "here is something my wife sends you, for she guessed I should overtake you."

It was a whole courgik, or galette. The honest fellow was not so truthful as he might have been, in saying that his wife sent it—for he had in truth stolen it out of her morning's baking, for his little runaway.

Nadine thanked him. It was, in truth, very acceptable, and her eyes filled with tears as she thought how kindly he had behaved to her throughout their brief acquaintance.

"And all because of papa," thought she, as she walked on—"and of our Father in Heaven," added she; for Nadine had been taught well enough to know that all human kindness comes, in fact, from God's mercy; and her wilful and often naughty

spirit was at this time filled with a calm sense of His protection and love.

She was now, she knew, in the direction of Jitomir, and was approaching another ravine. It was a lovely afternoon, and the water looked very inviting for a bathe. She went down to the brink, chose a quiet place under a tree, undressed herself, and went in.

A little English girl of twelve years old would be much too timid to venture alone into the water, with no one to watch that she was not disturbed, her clothes stolen, or to help her if she ventured out of her depth.

The first fear, it is true, Nadine felt—but there her fears ceased; she was an admirable swimmer—could dive, float, or do anything in the water like a duck or a fish; and at this moment this refresh-

ment was so much needed by her that she forgot her other fears.

She was just thinking of landing and dressing, when she felt a strong hand upon her shoulder; she had not heard anyone approach, either by land or water —but, on looking round, her terrified gaze encountered that of a tall, strong peasant woman, who held her fast, crying out,

"Ah! now, who gave you leave to come and bathe here on my master's grounds. Well, you'll not do it again, that's certain. Come, dress yourself, and follow me, and no struggling."

The woman was dressed for fishing, and had in hand one of the drag-nets employed in the large long ponds and lakes to catch the fresh-water craw-fish, here called lobsters. She was standing

in the water, and had approached Nadine noiselessly on the mud.

Nadine, on feeling her touch, dived under her hand, came up again, swam to the shore, ran to her clothes, dressed herself rapidly, and hoped she was in time to escape, when suddenly she felt again a hand on her arm, and heard the same voice exclaim,

"Ah, dear! Did you think to escape me so easily? You swim like a fish, but you dress like a lady and a farm-boy together. I shall just find out who you are."

And so saying, she half dragged, half led Nadine to her cottage, which was hidden in an orchard at no great distance.

Here she tied her fast to the door,

and with threatening looks told her that she had better not think of escaping again.

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CHAPTER IV.

NADINE, though much dismayed, was not of a desponding nature, and soon began to recover her spirits. She recollected, on the prompting of her young appetite, the courgik, which she had not lost, and began forthwith to eat it. At the sound of eating several little personages began to collect round and to gaze at her. There was a bullet-headed boy in a very scanty blue shirt, another smaller one in a voluminous brown one, and a little creature whose delicate features and beau-

tiful dark eyes peeped out under a mass of fair hair. This was a little girl, the pet of the whole party.

She fixed her bright eyes longingly on Nadine's cake. Nadine smiled, and the little creature pressed nearer to her.

Nadine broke off a piece, and gave it to the little girl, who took it eagerly and then drew back. Then she came near again, and, by several little manœuvres, made her brother lift her up to kiss Nadine and examine her bonds.

She tried with her tiny fingers to undo them.

"Ne nechevo ne norjna. You can't—you can't, duchinka, darling," replied Nadine.

The little creature threw herself into Nadine's arms and clung to her. Nadine felt her sobs.

"Mother, mother!" cried the child in the large brown garment, "here's little Adelka crying so that we don't know what to do."

The mother came, and seeing Adelka's distress, she released Nadine from the door, and let her sit down on a long settle at one end of the room, where the boys slept at night.

"You are obliged to my little one for this," she added; and as if Adelka had been able to comprehend, she caressed Nadine repeatedly.

As the evening drew on Nadine was allowed to sup with the woman and her children, and little Adelka fell asleep by her side, having refused to go near anyone else, even her favourite bullet-headed brother.

Owing to this fancy of Adelka's the

woman treated Nadine with less severity. She had just informed her that she might, if she would first take off her frock and petticoats, sleep beside Adelka on the stove.

This was to prevent her going off in the night, thought Nadine. Alas! the embroidered petticoats and the blue muslin frock were no longer very smooth nor very clean; but the good woman laid them on the settle, thinking in her own mind,

"They'll do nicely for Adelka at the Leafy Feast in a year or two."

Nadine, retaining her under-clothing with her coat, and placing her boots and hat near her, lay down beside Adelka.

At this moment a man entered the little room, and addressing the woman, asked if she had caught much fish that day?

She replied, that she had caught none.

"You have been out fishing, nevertheless."

She denied the charge.

"Your nets are still wet," cried the man, plunging his hand in a corner, where they had been hidden, and dragging them out. "Come along, come along —you shall remember this: fishing in my master's lake indeed!"

In vain the woman protested and entreated.

She was hastily marched off to the great house to receive her sentence; for this proprietor did not trust his intendent with full powers.

She dared not resist, and still less dared she, at this unpropitious moment, say anything about Nadine, lest she

should lose the clothes she meant to purloin, and the reward she hoped for on showing her prize to her master the next day.

The moment she was gone Nadine rose quietly to put on her clothes, but the bullet-headed boy had rolled over them in his sleep, and she could not get at them without awaking him.

"Never mind," thought she, "I can go as I am."

Her fine stockings and light "brodequins" would be hidden in the great boots; and with these last in her hand Nadine walked through the still open door, and was once more free.

Free!—yes, but homeless and friendless. Safe, indeed, from the rapacious woman, who would have stolen her roubles had she found them, but weary and lonely—

frightened at the idea of being caught and carried back to the cottage, and still more frightened at the thought of passing the night alone and out of doors.

However, she soon got back to the road, and began to climb the other side of the ravine. The sunset still tinted the sky, and as she walked rather fast, she overtook some other travellers, who were like herself on foot. They were pilgrims, going to the famous shrine of Ste. Varkara, or Ste. Barbe, and as they marched on they seemed to find the way neither long nor tedious, though most of them were barefoot, and carried their well-cleaned boots slung on a stick over their shoulders.

Nadine knew well what they were, and asked herself whether she should join them or not. She would be safe, she

thought, among them; but then the idea of being entirely thrown into their company for days together disgusted her. The distinction of class is perhaps nowhere more clearly defined than in Russia. The feudal rights of noble proprietors, with a peasantry belonging to them, all attached to the soil, make the children of these proprietors feel at a very early age that they may *give* without limit to their inferiors, but that to *mingle* with them is to debase themselves.

Nadine had certainly twice lain down with the little peasants on their stove-bed, and shared their supper, but it was only when forced to do so, and never by choice.

She looked at the pilgrims, and felt that she could never join their ranks. So she

lay down on the grass in a hollow, and they passed without noticing her. On they went briskly and cheerfully, feeling sure of an answer to the prayers which they were about to offer at their favourite shrine.

On they went, and left Nadine alone.

The poor girl's heart began now to fail her very fast indeed. She felt ill, her head ached, and when she tried to stand up she found herself giddy and bewildered. She had certainly refreshed herself by her bath, but the events and exertions of the last two days had overtaxed her strength too much for it to be thus easily restored, and she now knew not where to take refuge for the night.

She lay down again because she could not stand, and almost regretted the corner of the stove, where she might have

slept soundly even though it *was* in a cottage.

Poor little Nadine! all was confused before her sleepless but unconscious eyes. The little Russian lady, born to luxury, and used to being surrounded with willing servitors, now lay alone like a wretched runaway serf—tired, feverish, so changed in dress and appearance, that even her sisters could scarcely have recognised her in her altered condition. And Antonina would certainly have cried bitterly had she seen her poor Barichna Nedejda Nicolaievna in this sad state.

It seemed to Nadine very long since she had lain down, when she heard voices close to her. She could not distinguish what they said, nor even whether they spoke Russian or French, but she felt herself raised up and carried away—

whither she cared not to inquire, and was too ill to find out.

She was scarcely aware of a change of movement; and when at length she faintly returned to consciousness, and saw herself in a bed, in a pleasant room; she had no idea how she had arrived there. She tried to raise her hand to put back the curtain and see who was before her, but she could not.

However, the movement was perceived, and her attendant, a stout little woman of about fifty, fixed her piercing black eyes upon her, and asked if she wanted anything.

This woman wore a thick row of coral round her neck, denoting that she had been a nurse in some wealthy family.

Nadine tried to reply, but her strength was not yet sufficiently restored—the

scenes she had gone through still danced in her poor little head a sort of mazurka, of which the leading couple still would be — her meeting with her sisters in the carriage, and her escape from the first cottage.

Her attendant put a glass of something to her lips; it was warm and liquid, and Nadine drank it eagerly. She tried to judge how long it was since she had seen the pilgrims pass, but here her memory quite failed. It was evening then, and it was morning now; but how many times the sun had risen and set in the interval she could not guess.

Presently another person entered — a young man of a gentle, clever countenance — who came near, felt her pulse, asked a few questions of the nurse, and withdrew, after giving her some directions.

In a few minutes he called her attendant away, and then three voices seemed to mingle together in the next room. Nadine, rapidly recovering her scattered senses, overheard two or three sentences.

"How long has she been awake?"

"An hour or so."

"It is just twelve hours since we found her. Has she slept much, do you think?" said the low voice.

"Oh, yes, nearly all the time."

"Who can she be, I wonder? No one in the neighbourhood has lost a child—and yet she can hardly have come very far."

"Will she recover?"

"Oh, yes, and rapidly. She was only exhausted by fatigue and distress—there is no fever at all to-day."

"How unhappy they must all be at her home!"

"Yes, I hope her wandering is only owing to some mishap, poor child, and not to a fit of wilfulness," said the third voice.

"Oh, and if it were, she must have suffered and repented bitterly by this time, poor little dear!" said the low, gentle voice of the doctor.

He now came into the room and took the nurse's place near Nadine. The little girl's face was turned away, for the last words had pierced her to the quick, and she was struggling to repress her sobs. Consciousness had now quite returned, and with it, and the kind words she had heard, the sense of her misconduct.

The young doctor watched her for a moment or two, and guessed how it was with her, but fearing lest her violent emo-

tion might do her harm, he went near to her and took her hand.

"My dear child," said he, "you are very unhappy. Will you not tell me why? Perhaps I can comfort you?"

"No, no," sobbed Nadine, "no one can do that."

Her powers of utterance had returned, but she could only speak in short sentences. She let him keep her hand, however, and draw down the sheet with which she had covered her face. He spoke again.

"You are still too weak to tell me your story," said he, gently; "and perhaps you will not like to do so."

Nadine turned her eyes full upon him.

"I think," said he, as if struck by a sudden thought, "that I can guess it. Shall I try?"

"Yes, sir—yes," murmured Nadine.

"You are the daughter of General Miralov, and you were left at home with a governess, and you ran away from home. Is that true?"

Nadine fixed her eyes wide open in astonishment upon him.

"Yes, yes," she again murmured.

"And you did not think how wrong it was, and how weak you were; and you forgot while you were crying, 'God help me!' that God had said 'Children, obey your parents!' This is what your brother Adrien feared would happen."

"Adrien!—you know him?"

"We were at college together, and I met him about three weeks ago at Kiev. He was going to St. Petersburgh, and he told me he was unhappy about his little sisters at home."

"Dear Adrien!" and Nadine wept again.

"When we were coming home to my father's house last night from Kiev," said her new friend, "we found you by the roadside. We thought you were a poor little peasant suddenly seized with illness, and took you into the carriage and brought you home. On the way one of your boots fell off, and showed us you were in disguise—that it was not one of our own people's children that we had picked up—but we could ask you nothing, because you were quite unconscious. Now you will get well quickly, and you may be sure we shall all take care of you. Do not speak, but lie still."

So saying, he bent over her and kissed her forehead. Poor Nadine! for three days and a half she had had no caress

except little Adelka's, and she felt as if no one had ever been so kind as her doctor—for so she considered him.

Sweet tears rolled down her cheeks, her hands were tightly clasped on her heart; and so, in a state of sweet repentance—being tired out—she fell asleep again, whilst her good friend watched over her.

When she awoke he was still there—still watching her.

He smiled as he saw her open her eyes.

"Do you feel better now?"

"Yes, quite well, thank you," replied Nadine, cheerfully—"I should like to get up."

"Take this first, and then you may," said he, presenting a glass of tea, and some bubliki. Bubliki, by the way, are

more like cracknels, made in large tins, than any other specimen of boulangerie.

Nadine was hungry, and ate with pleasure. Her friend then left her, and the nurse came to dress her, and lift her on a large sofa that stood in the apartment. He then returned, and seeing that she was very comfortable, asked her for her story.

Nadine told it with perfect openness and simplicity.

"And you meant to go to St. Petersburgh?" said he; "my dear little friend, you would never have arrived there. It is well that you have fallen in with some one to take care of you, for otherwise you would never have reached your sister Hélène."

"And now?" asked Nadine eagerly.

"Now Nadejda Nicolaievna shall decide

for herself. I will conduct her safely to St. Petersburgh if she still thinks it right, wise, or necessary to go there—if she still thinks her sister would be pleased to see her on an errand of complaint against her governess; and if she still thinks it impossible to live as a little girl should do, and to bear a disagreeable yoke patiently, as by her own account some one in her family does bear it."

"Yes, Vera, Vëra!" cried Nadine, eagerly.

He went on.

"Or I will take her home to that some one to-day. I will beg her governess to forgive her, and I will write to St. Petersburgh to explain the whole story to her sister."

"Will you?" cried Nadinè, starting up. "Will you? And will you really

take care of me all the way, whichever I choose?"

"Yes, I will, my dear little girl—but you must consider quietly which you really wish. I will leave you alone for some time; when you have decided ring this bell; and do not forget, dear child, to ask God to direct you," whispered he, as he kissed her once more.

Nadine's first thought was certainly that now she *could* go safely to Hélène. But a little reflection showed her that her duty was clearly to return home, to relieve her sister Vera and Miss Rodney from their fears, and to place herself willingly under that yoke that she had so unlawfully thrown off, and humble herself to that authority she had spurned. She followed her friend's advice, and this, of course, strengthened the latter view. But still

the temptation was very strong to go straight to Hélène, and to tell her all—to obtain new laws and new privileges, and to return the benefactress of the little world—the heroine of many adventures!

It really was very tempting; but the words spoken by her new friend had revived the sense of duty and of submission implanted by Hélène, but long suppressed by her opposition to Miss Rodney and plans of revolt. Her eyes filled again with tears of repentance and of gratitude for all the kindness of her new friend.

She rang her little bell.

Her friend entered.

"Well," said he, smiling, "have you decided?"

"Yes, yes," cried Nadine, struggling to keep down her still powerful longing

to go to St. Petersburgh. "Yes, I have decided; and I shall be very, very thankful if you will take me back to my sisters and Miss Rodney." Here her voice faltered, and her whole face quivered with emotion. "And write to Hélène," added she, almost inaudibly.

"Yes, I will, indeed, my dear little Nadejda Nicolaievna; and I can venture to promise you that you will never be sorry you have thus decided. Now, have you anything else to ask me?—my letter is written, you see!"

And he held up two letters, one to Vera, the other to Hélène.

"I was prepared for both answers, you see," said he, "for we have very little time to lose. My sister is coming directly to make acquaintance with you, and then we must dine and start for

your home. Have you anything more to ask me?"

"I should like to know who you are?" said she timidly; "and where I am?"

He smiled.

"You are in the house of Count Paul Putiatine, and I am his son, Viatcheslav Pavlovich Putiatine; my sister is married to Baron Berg, and lives in Courland, but she is here now on a visit. Here she is!"

A tall, stiff lady entered as he spoke.

"Good morning, my dear; I am delighted to find you better, and hope you are fully aware of the great sin you have committed in leaving your natural protectors.

"Yes, madam," said poor Nadine, now

quite too humble to resent the lady's tone and manner.

"Enough, dear sister," said Viatcheslav; "she has given the strongest possible proof of repentance, for she has given up her expedition, and is ready to return with me to her home."

"I am very glad indeed to hear it," returned his sister, coldly; "and I trust you have done your duty by her, Viatcheslav, and have explained to her how very unbecoming her conduct has been."

Viatcheslav looked annoyed, but at this moment a servant knocked at the door, with the "Pajolonista cushit," "If you please, dine," which summons in a Russian household is equivalent to our "Dinner is on the table," or the French

"*On à Servi,*" or the prettier Italian "*E servita.*"

The Baroness's appetite being well set, and Viatcheslav anxious to relieve Nadine of her presence, they both quickly attended to the summons.

Nadine's little dinner was sent her immediately, and she was allowed half an hour's rest after it. Then, the carriage having come to the door, she was wrapped in a cloak over a clean muslin frock, and carried downstairs by Viatcheslav himself.

As he was carrying her to the carriage, he was stopped by an old white-headed, white-bearded man, who, stooping over her, said,

"Come back again, my pretty bird, when you are quite well, and bring your sisters too. My son will be very

glad to see you again. He is a man of sense — Viatcheslav has good taste."

Nadine thanked him for his kindness, but she did not understand his last words. His son did, and, looking annoyed, hastened to put the little girl into the carriage, and to jump in himself after.

The Baroness appeared in the distance, but did not approach for a cordial farewell; and Nadine felt relieved when the carriage moved off, and she was alone with her protector.

We must not omit to state, that Nadine had emptied her little purse into the hands of the nurse who had waited upon her and watched her with so much care.

At present taking leave of the

little runaway for awhile, we must return to Vera and Aimée, and learn how it has fared with them.

CHAPTER V.

When the carriage had left our little adventuress hiding for fear of being recognized, it rolled on towards Garasavka, its three occupants all very silent. Miss Rodney groaned at intervals, for she had managed to tumble down a slippery hill, and to hurt her head against the trunk of a tree, during the day's pleasuring. Vera was thinking of Hélène, and Aimée of the pretty little boy she had just seen.

As they entered the village the intendant drove up, and then gave Vera a packet of letters.

She first opened one from Hélène, and after giving an enclosed note to Miss Rodney, buried herself in her corner to enjoy her own. But the first few lines made her almost leap from her seat.

She looked at Miss Rodney to see if she was equally surprised at the contents of hers. Miss Rodney, however, had not yet opened it. Letters from Hélène were not to her all that they were to Vera.

Vera's letter contained the following very startling intelligence, namely, that Hélène wished to see Miss Rodney, in order to consult her upon some business, and that in the interval an Eng-

lish lady, whose acquaintance she had lately made, would come and stay with Vera and her sisters in Miss Rodney's place.

The letter concluded by giving Vera some very kind and loving advice as to the terms on which she should live with her new protectress, and desired her not to inform Aimée and Nadine of the change, as Miss Rodney would like to do so herself.

That lady was further requested to accompany a cousin of the children, who would come to Garasavka early in the month of July, on her way to St. Petersburgh from Austria.

Aimée, who had no letter, was impatient to arrive and tell Nadine all they had heard and seen. Vera, feeling as if in a dream, folded up her letter as

they drew up to the door, and seeing that Miss Rodney had just read and crushed hers together in her hand, did not venture to speak.

They reached the schoolroom door, when the governess drew forth the key from her pocket, and expected, no doubt, to see her little rebel still in the room, and looking very cross. How disappointed was she to find her gone, and nothing visible except the melancholy dogs'-eared copybooks and ill-used grammars and dictionaries, that had caused and inflicted so much punishment on their young students.

"She must have got out! There must be two keys to the door! Or she has got out by Vera's room and the back passage! Little wretch!"

Such were Miss Rodney's incoherent

exclamations ; it is probable the letter she had just received had embittered her temper; for certainly poor Nadine's character was not spared in the abuse she poured upon her.

Aimée was all astonishment at the boldness of Nadine, and at her cleverness. She could not guess how Nadine had escaped ; but Vera silently pointed to the ventilator, which was still open. Every one of them, however, thought that the fugitive was only gone out to amuse herself by hiding ; and though a strict search was immediately made, Vera went to receive her guests, and apologize for her long absence, and no one thought of being alarmed.

In the evening, however, while they were discussing the probabilities of the case, they began to be frightened at

her long concealment, and Aimée asked a servant who had ordered supper.

"Nadejda Nicolaievna," was the reply, "as she was going into the garden."

"Did she order it carelessly?" asked Vera.

"Oh, no, she said it was to be very punctually served, and very good — as good as last night."

"And where was she going?"

"Into the garden. I said I thought the young ladies were all in the woods, and she replied, 'Ah! but I am punished, Boris,' so sadly that it went to my heart for her."

"Hush, you little monkey!" cried he to a boy who just now entered, crying loudly, and thereby interrupting the eloquence of Boris. "Hush, will you," cried he, going to the door which the boy was now ap-

proaching, "what are you doing here? Bringing me your quarrels, to disturb my young ladies, eh?"

"Hu! hu! hu!" sobbed the boy, "I am robbed, I am robbed! Somebody has taken away my coat, cap, and shoes. I left them all under the mulberry-tree."

"Aimée! the boy, the pretty boy—perhaps that was Nadine. Oh, can she have really gone off in disguise?" cried Vera, in just alarm.

Aimée thought the idea magnificent, but was alarmed to see how pale Vera grew.

"Put fresh horses directly!" cried Vera, quickly turning to the servant—"to a telega, and let me know when it is ready."

She took a few biscuits for Nadine

and herself; told her guests and Miss Rodney where she was going, and started under the care of a trusty old servant.

Miss Rodney ought to have objected; but the letter she had received made her feel that her occupation was gone, and, having a headache, she retired to her bedroom, leaving Aimée to amuse her friends.

Vera was out nearly all night, and came home distracted with fear for Nadine: no one had seen or heard of her. It was a dreadful night at Garasavka. Vera felt as if all the evils she had ever heard of were about to overwhelm them. She paced up and down her room, praying; she threw herself upon her bed, praying: nothing soothed her but that ceaseless cry of

those in trouble—which is never in vain, and always brings deliverance at last.

CHAPTER VI.

THE very night that Vera endured these agonies, Nadine passed, as we know, in the cart first, and then in the cottage of the good Petruschka, whilst Aimée was crying herself to sleep in her own little bed. Early in the morning the first pale rays of a June day fell upon the letter from Hélène that Vera had left upon the table, in her room, when she set out upon her fruitless search after Nadine. The sight of this letter

renewed her distress. How little had Hélène foreseen, she thought, in what state it would find them; and how little had Nadine foreseen that it was on its way when she took her case desperately into her own hands.

The poor distressed girl then went out and paced nervously up and down the little garden.

Going, after a few minutes, to Aimée, she saw, by the child's swollen features, how she had cried before going to sleep. But on the white wall beside her there were some words traced in black crayon.

Vera bent over to read them. They were as follows:—

"Nadine, a true heroine, left home 20th June, 185—, in disguise. God speed her!"

Vera could not help smiling a little at the admiration Nadine's absurdity had excited in her younger sister. But the groans she heard from the next-room attracted her attention; and she went in, to see Miss Rodney, whom she found complaining very much of headache, and much more occupied with her own sufferings than with anything else.

She would not, at all events, appear to be alarmed about Nadine, but persisted in saying that she was only hidden somewhere about the premises.

Vera could not comfort herself with this thought; but she occupied herself with the care of Miss Rodney, and other domestic duties, inquiring anxiously, from hour to hour, if there was any news of Nadine.

There was none, and she walked

wretchedly up and down the little garden till the bells of the chapel rang—as it was a fête day—for morning service. Gladly did she avail herself of this comfort, and begged that there might be prayers for the safety of her sister. This exercise of devotion relieved her a little, and she returned home to write to Hélène, thinking that she could do so easily enough.

After twenty efforts, however, she threw down her pen, and resolved that she would not write till she had something certain to say. Poor Vera! the room seemed to turn round with her when she thought of what that news might be, and, hastily crossing the court to the great house, she entered the "Buffet," and, calling to Vacili, asked him if any steps had as yet been taken

to inform the rural police of the disappearance of her sister.

He said that nothing had been done, and that Nadejda Nicolaievna was probably in a town by this time.

"So much the better," returned Vera, "for in a town they will demand her passport directly, and prevent her going farther; but in the country anything may happen to her."

Here she turned away to hide her grief.

At the door of her own wing she saw a group of ladies'-maids whispering together very mysteriously. Thinking that they had heard something, she pressed forwards, and begged to know what had been discovered.

Her agitated face, pale with the idea that poor Nadine had been found

drowned, or disfigured, a hideous spectacle, seemed to seal the lips of all, and their whispers as she approached sank into silence.

"Tell me—tell me, what *is* the matter?" cried Vera. "Is she dead? Tell me at once!"

"No, no, Vera Nicolaievna," cried one, bolder than the rest; "not dead, but dying!"

"Not dying, but run away!" cried another.

"Not run away, but lost!" added a third.

"Not lost, but light-headed!" cried a fourth.

While Vera, turning from one to another, utterly bewildered, knew not what to believe.

At last she exclaimed, gasping,

"Tell me, is Nadine found?"

"No, Vera Nicolaievna, but Liubov Nicolaievna is lost, and——"

"And Miss Rodney is light-headed!"

This was the news, then: not Nadine found, but Aimée lost, and Miss Rodney delirious.

Relieved from her fears, Vera exclaimed,

"Oh, Aimée can't be lost! Send the doctor to Miss Rodney directly!"

And she went herself to see her. It was true. The poor woman was calling wildly for her pupils, and saying that she had lost them all by her own fault, but that she could not, and would not, go away till they were found.

And she wailed and sobbed so that Vera could not pacify her. She would have been almost as ill perhaps had

not her thoughts been so painfully pre-occupied; as it was, she was at the moment anxious only for the arrival of the doctor, who, after what seemed to her a very long hour, made his appearance, and immediately administered to the patient the usual remedies for the fever of the country.

Vera had already darkened the room, and now placed a glass of iced orgeat beside the patient, and desired Antonina not to leave her. Antonina had much rather have wept and gossiped over the disappearance of her two young ladies.

She begged Vera to go and eat some breakfast, saying that the cutlets and the serniki were quite cold, and she had, therefore, brought her some hot coffee. Vera thanked her, and

partook of the refreshment almost mechanically; observing at the time that Miss Rodney must forego that morning her favourite beverage, as she was strictly dieted.

Relieved in part from this care, Vera began to revolve in her own mind all that had been said of Aimée, and wondered at her slowness in not before seeing that this little sister had actually followed the other little sister's example, and gone off in disguise also.

"Poor Aimée!" thought she, "she has not the physical strength, or the courage and cleverness of Nadine. She will not venture very far, but she may be in great danger and distress for all that. Oh, poor Hélène!"

Her throat swelled to suffocation as she thought of what her distress would

be on hearing that her two little sisters were lost, and lost by their own fault. "By mine also, perhaps," thought Vera, "for I had never considered their danger, and therefore never warned them against it."

She was not however, one to indulge long in useless sorrow. She sent to the Buffet, and ordered all the people of the court to come before her.

Being quickly assembled, this rather numerous population, curious to know what their young mistress had to say to them, crowded into the little garden. Vera then came to the door, and standing on its threshold, said in a calm, earnest tone,

"You know that both my sisters have disappeared. If anyone can give any true tidings of either of them, he

shall certainly have a rich reward from my father. And if anyone can find and bring me either of them, he may ask my father what he will, and I promise him it shall be granted. On the other hand, if anyone is found guilty of hiding either of these children, or of assisting her to escape from her home, he shall be punished, as my father knows how to punish. Help me, my dear friends, to find them. Liïubov cannot be far away, as she only left us this morning. She is not strong and active like Nadejda and cannot be very far off. I am sure she has not left the village. Let every boy and girl above eight and under fifteen be brought into the court. Let every izba, field, and garden be searched, and let anyone who thinks he has seen Aimée since last night come

into the house and speak to me. As for Nadejda Nicolaievna, I have sent to the police. I fear she is far beyond our neighbourhood."

Her voice faltered, but after a pause she rallied and went on:

"Go quickly, and make my commands known throughout this village and the two nearest. I will order the intendant to give a rich present directly to whoever brings me my sisters."

Some of the peasants now came forward to kiss the hand of their young mistress, but she passed rapidly into the house to try and compose herself before going into Miss Rodney's room.

That poor creature was asleep, but restless and very feverish. Vera stayed with her but a few minutes, and then left her under Antonina's care, while

she went to visit Tais and little Ta, whom she heard at play in an adjoining apartment.

On entering their room a very pretty sight brightened her thoughts and lightened her heart. The little child was running to and fro between her father and her young aunt, throwing handfuls of flowers in their faces, and laughing at the mess she made and at their grimaces.

Her father, the sad young widower, found smiles for his beautiful little girl and knelt before her, that he might thus better watch the play of her round fair limbs, and the beauty of her clear brown eyes, laughing even more than her rosy lips and dimpling cheeks.

Her little chemise of finest cambric was her only covering, except a quantity of golden chestnut hair that hung down her

tiny person. The whiteness of her clear pure skin, and the fine moulding of each limb, were seen to great advantage in this guise, which, be it remembered, is not unusual here for very young children in summer.

Her aunt Tais, a tall, slight girl of twelve, with a very long neck and small head, sat on the floor opposite her brother, and laughed merrily at every fresh attack of little Ta, and at the frequent harmless falls that were the result of her efforts.

At the sight of Vera, Tais sprung to her feet, and a look of self-reproach succeeded to her gaiety.

"Oh! Vera, have you heard anything?"

"Yes," said Vera, trying to speak calmly, "that Nadine is not to be found, and that Aimée is gone also!"

"Aimée gone also!" cried both her auditors, coming near to her, and taking each a hand with looks of such sympathy that Vera could scarcely nerve herself to continue—

"I have sent to the district police to describe Nadine, and have ordered our villages to be searched for Aimée. She cannot have gone far; for she was here this morning."

"Yes, she was here, playing with Ta, very early. She had dressed herself up in some odd costume, to amuse Ta, as she said; but she was crying so much all the time about Nadine, that Ta began to cry also. And then she went away, saying that it was very hard Ta should cry when she had come on purpose to amuse her; and the nurse told her that it was because she cried, and that Ta

was too little to enter into her grief, and was only saddened by it.

"Then you did not see her? You do not know what her costume was?"

"No, I was asleep; and the nurse only said it was a sort of dress with the face almost covered up."

"The Turkish dress!" cried Vera. "Then it must be wanting. I will run and see."

She ran, followed by Tais, up to the garret in the great house, where were all the stores of costumes for acting plays, &c., and she found that the case of Turk costumes was open, and a lady's costume missing. Wondering at the simplicity of her sister, her heart was greatly lightened; for she felt sure that Aimée must be quickly recognised thus disguised.

She then spoke of Miss Rodney's illness, when Tais, looking out of the window, saw little Ta running about alone in her scanty attire. She pointed her out to Vera, who with a smile remarked that she was not much dressed for a scamper out of doors.

"She did worse than that the other day," said Tais, anxious to divert Vera's mind a little from all her cares. "We had been out together at Prince W——'s, and I had made her a crown of bluebells. The nurse was going to give her a bath and then dress her for the evening, and had already undressed her, when she left the room to fetch her linen, not observing that I had just vanished also. Finding herself alone, and on the ground-floor, little Ta darted through the open window and ran down the garden, enjoy-

ing the fresh evening air to perfection; for she had nothing on but her blue shoes. All at once she heard a voice cry, 'Ta, Ta,' and, looking round, she saw Prince W—— himself following her. Struck with sudden consciousness, she tried to get under a rose-bush, but only succeeded in hiding her pretty head. The Prince took her up and carried her back to the house, much amused at her excessive confusion, and her nurse's consternation."

"How pretty she must have looked," said Vera, "with her head in a rose-bush! But I suppose we had better catch her."

"Yes," said her friend, "poor Dmitri is, I suppose, again lost in thought, and has not seen her slip away."

So saying, she ran to find her little

niece, and Vera went through the garden and offices calling Aimée, half suspecting she might be hidden there. Even knowing Aimée as well as she did, she could hardly understand why she had chosen so extraordinary a moment for making her escapade, and so absurd a dress for the purpose. Imitation had always been one of Aimée's great weaknesses—to copy without emulating Nadine her especial propensity.

However, it appeared certain that she had now at least not hidden herself in the precincts of the court or garden, for Vera's search was most complete. Having made it, she returned to take her place by Miss Rodney; and it must be owned that the unamiable governess was nursed as if the family had been free from all other anxiety;

even Tais came to offer her assistance.

It would surprise English girls to see how early Russian children are clever nurses. A little girl of eleven years old will put on leeches, attend to them and the patient, and put them up again with perfect ease and skill; and a girl of fifteen is supposed to be able to do anything for the sick.

From the bed-side of her patient Vera was summoned to the dinner-table, where the sight of her pale face stopped all the conversation that had been going on, and produced a dead pause. Several of the dependents who had not seen her since the loss of Nadine, and had only just heard of Aimée's disappearance, tried to speak, but their efforts were so feeble that they only made the silence and constraint more painful.

Dmitri, the young widower, was now of the greatest use. Waking up, as if accidentally, from his usual silent reverie, he asked a question of the music-master, which so set his fancy on fire, kindling at the same time that of the other professors, that, relinquishing their own many languages for one which they all understood, they merged Russian, Polish, Austrian, French, German, in the brilliant Latin, and left poor Vera quiet under the shelter of their discussion, in which Dmitri so far took part that when it seemed to flag he threw salt into the flame and made it leap up higher than before. Vera however, notwithstanding this aid, felt herself more and more unequal to the task of remaining in company, and was growing so pale that Dmitri was on the point of taking her

out when a messenger arrived to summon her to Miss Rodney, who was in a violent fit of hysterics. Vera upon this rose from her seat and Madame Knesebeck, an Hanoverian, Tais's governess, was about to follow her.

But Vera begged her to remain, saying that she thought Miss Rodney could not bear more than one person at a time, and that she was quite able to go herself.

She did not look so, they all agreed, and it grieved their kind hearts to let her go alone. Alone, in fact, she did not go; for Dmitri would not allow it. He took her across the court, and remained in the room next Miss Rodney's, in order to be at hand should the scene prove too much for Vera's strength or nerves.

He was surprised to find that this pale girl, who had crossed the court feebly and with difficulty, knew however, perfectly how to humour and control the enervated woman of more than twice her age. He was struck also with admiration at the tact, firmness, and tenderness with which she managed the patient. Not a word did she say too much or too little —nothing to grieve or irritate, but all that could soothe and strengthen. He heard her, mastering her own despair, console Miss Rodney with hopes of Nadine's and Aimée's return; he heard the wild cries and laughter of the invalid subside first into quiet weeping, and then cease altogether; he waited yet a little while, and heard Vera praying beside her for her restoration and the recovery of her pupils; and after another short interval, he saw

the dear girl herself come out of the room, very pale, but composed.

"She is better," said she faintly, and as she passed a table she caught at it, as if to steady herself. "She is better and is gone to sleep," said she, more firmly. "Have you been here all this time? How very good of you! Thank—" Dmitri was just in time to help her to a chair. "Thank you," said she. "I believe I had better sit down. I am tired but I want to go now."

Once more her head grew giddy, and it sunk down on the table this time. Dmitri tried to raise her, but she was in a dead faint. He called Antonina out of the sick room, sent her for a glass of water, and made her help him to place Vera on her bed, sternly arresting her exclamation by a look, and

bidding her return as quickly as possible to Miss Rodney.

He then opened all the windows, sprinkled Eau de Cologne over the face of the fainting girl, and even forced a few drops into her mouth.

As she remained insensible, he was obliged to call an old woman from the work-room, whom he directed to undress her young mistress, and to apply restoratives to her chest, and hot-water bottles to her feet.

He then went to see his little Ta, and to send the doctor to Vera.

The doctor poor man, was well nigh worn out with the repeated calls upon him; but he loved Vera, and left his favourite game at "Préférence," to hasten to her. He remained until he saw her open her eyes and revive, and

then left her, giving strict orders to her attendant not to let her stir from her bed till he gave her leave.

It was the loveliest hour in the twenty-four—five o'clock—when Vera fully recovered her scattered senses, and awoke to the complete sense of her misery. Her first impulse was to raise, once again, the cry for mercy and forgiveness, for help and protection, for her poor little misguided sisters, and for herself in her deep loneliness.

Then, finding herself alone, she rose and dressed herself hastily, and glided into Miss Rodney's room. That poor sufferer was still sleeping, but her fever was beginning to run high, and Antonina's exclamation, on seeing Vera—"Oh! how the gentleman will scold old Mariuska!"—almost awoke her. Vera did not attend

much to the exclamation, but sitting down —for she still trembled too much to stand —she began to resume her duties as nurse at the bedside of her governess.

While she was thus engaged the doctor called. He was surprised and very angry at the sight of Vera tending Miss Rodney. And right well did he scold her.

She pleaded that she was quite well, and less sad when busy. He shook his head incredulously, and muttered,

"Quite well! quite well! with that white face, and those quivering lips and hands! Oh! Vera Nicolaievna, what would Hélène Nicolaievna say to this?"

Fortunately for Vera she was at this moment called away, or there is no possibility of knowing what the effect of this allusion to Hélène might have had upon her already highly-excited nerves.

She had been called to hear that no trace of either of her sisters could be found. Sadly thanking the messengers of evil tidings, she returned to her own room to seek for fresh strength, and then once more took her place by Miss Rodney's bedside, and continued to watch the fitful delusion and stupor of the poor patient.

The moon was rising, when an unusual commotion in the court, exciting a vague feeling of hope, made her go out and leave Antonina with Miss Rodney for a few minutes. On reaching the enclosure she found a considerable crowd gathered together who made way for her on all sides, and in the midst she observed Vacili leading an odd-looking, dirty, monkey-like figure, in a ragged Turkish dress.

Vera immediately exclaimed, "Aimée!

oh! Aimée! Thank God!" And eagerly asked the servant where he had found her.

It was in a little shed, he said, at the back of the gardener's cottage.

The gardener's cottage was just outside the garden, near the water, and it seemed surprising that no one should have thought of examining it; but the fact was every one went too far, except Vacili, who, it appears, well knew his young lady.

Vera would not ask Aimée for her story then, nor did she utter one word of reproach, but took her into the house, gave her some supper, put her to bed, knelt down beside her, returned thanks for her safety, and then went to tell Dmitri and Tais, and poor Miss Rodney,

who was, however, too ill to understand her.

Vera could not be persuaded to leave the governess's room that night. She felt as if she ought to be there, now that so great a mercy had been granted to her. The doctor's manner led her to expect a sudden crisis in his patient's disorder; so that she dared not commit her to the care of any one else. Nor would she consent to Antonina's sitting up with her—the poor girl, she said, needed rest, and had been hard at work all day; but she accepted the company of Mariuska, the old dame who had watched her at Dmitri's request.

Having resolved not to fall asleep till the crisis should be over, she sat watching and feeling the hours pass wearily away—thankful, indeed, for Ai-

mée's being restored to her, but still more cruelly alive to intense fears for Nadine, who seemed to have wandered so much farther, and might have met with all kinds of troubles during her long absence; and again Hélène's face of distress when she should hear it all, and poor Adrien's sorrow at his intimation having come too late, (for, though Hélène did not say so, Vera perceived that it was his representations that had given rise to the "invitation" Miss Rodney had received)—all passed before her, and so filled her thoughts that she scarcely heard her patient move till she saw her standing right in front of her.

Vera trembled.

Mariuska screamed, and Miss Rodney turned hastily to the screaming servant.

"What do you mean?" cried she,

angrily—"what do you mean, Antonina, by this noise in my room? Go out directly—I will have no jabbering here! Get away all of you—go and chatter somewhere else, I wont have you here!"

Vera, recovering herself, took hold of Miss Rodney gently by the arm, and said,

"Dear Miss Rodney, come to bed, it is late."

"Ah, ah, ah, ah! Madame Hélène, so it's you is it? You're come back just in time to find Mademoiselle Nadine and Mademoiselle Aimée running off to hide themselves! But they shall repent of it, that they shall!"

This sudden apostrophe to her sister made poor Vera tremble and grow paler than before; but she replied quietly,

"Yes, Miss Rodney—no doubt; but we will talk of that to-morrow. Get into bed now, and tell me about their lessons."

This was a good idea—Miss Rodney got, or rather fell, into bed and began talking about grammars, geographies, histories, and mythologies, till she quieted herself into drowsiness.

Vera then told Mariuska to bring her the iced vinegar, with which she wetted her patient's head, then gave her her midnight draught, and had the satisfaction of seeing her drink it calmly, and soon fall into a deep sleep.

She sat long beside her, watching that sleep, which became by degrees more and more natural; until convinced at length that the crisis was over, and that the poor woman would soon be well

again, sleep overcame her also — she sank back in her chair, and not only slept but dreamt.

CHAPTER VII.

She dreamt that she was alone on a bleak hill-side, a river near her, and a few scattered graves; she knew the place, it was her own home, and the graves bore the names of those dearest to her. The wind moaned sadly through the tottering remnants of her ancestral mansion, and swept along the hill; the night-bird screamed, and a shooting star sped down the blue vault of heaven and was lost to sight. She tried to find flowers for the graves; but though they were in what had

been the garden* she could find nothing but thorns and briars. She wove these into crowns, and remembered who had worn for them a crown of thorns. Then feeling that there was no one to bury, she slowly and painfully collected a funeral pile for herself, and repeated as she did so some lines that Hélène had really written some time before, weeping bitterly all the time, so it seemed in her dream:

"In sculptured tomb I would not rest,
With vain magnificence around,
Shut out from all those I love best,
And trusted to the death-cold ground.

"Nor would I be embalmed, and lie
A check on all their heedless glee—
Of life a ghostly mockery,
An annual spectacle to be.

"Nor would I choose, though that were gain,
'Neath the old yew beside the stream,
That spot where shadows of our fane
Fall thwart the mountain's silver gleam.

* This is not unusual in Russia.

"There, it is true, the thought of me
Oft in each gentle heart might rise,
And still, whene'er they came to pray,
Win a soft glance from those dear eyes.

"I would not in their garden lie,
Though nearer to their daily life,
Though there with sweetest minstrelsy
From those dear lips the air is rife.

"No—let me rather shrink away,
Till by the spicy flame consumed,
Then let a hand belovèd lay
Mine ashes in a fold perfumed.

"And thus the warm and beating heart
For ever on its pulses wear,
So might I still my loving part
In all its joys and sorrows bear."

Then suddenly, when her pyre was ready, the thought struck her that there was no one to bear her ashes to the haunts she loved—that she was utterly alone.

And then it seemed to her that a beam of sunshine shone upon the graves —that a hand touched the thorn crowns,

and they bloomed—that it rested also upon the ruin, and it became a church; her funeral pyre then vanished in incense—and in its place appeared a house, which bore upon it this significant name, "The House of the Houseless." And the bells rang, and she saw herself, followed by some orphan children, leave the house and go into the church for service. And a voice said, "Give us this day our daily bread." And it was Hélène's voice. Then the glorious sunshine passed away, and in the agony of longing to see Hélène, or hear her speak again, Vera awoke, and, behold! it was a dream.

"He reached the glory of a hand
That seemed to touch it into leaf—
The voice was not the voice of grief,
The words were hard to understand."

TENNYSON.

But not all a dream; there was the

sound of bells, and the glorious sunlight had just risen upon the earth. The bells, the bells!—a carriage! Vera sees that Miss Rodney is quietly asleep, and goes out into the court. A carriage is driving into it up to the great house.

A wild thought of seeing Hélène darts into Vera's mind, but she observes directly that it is a strange carriage. Another moment, and a little girl is lifted from it, and is in Vera's arms!

"Oh, Nadine Nadine!" And Vera can say no more, for she has fainted, while poor Nadine cries and sobs, and kisses her to bring her back to life.

The servants, Vacili at their head, now heard the carriage also, and quickly conducted the strange gentleman who had accompanied Nadine to a distant

wing, whilst the two sisters were brought to their own rooms.

Vera was no sooner laid upon her bed than she began to recover, and bade Nadine undress and come to sleep with her.

Tired and exhausted were both little sisters, but they could not cease from kissing each other and saying, "Vera," "Nadine," at every moment, as if to make sure that they really were together again. At last Nadine cried,

"Oh, Vera, Vera, say you forgive me!"

"Of course Nadine, now I have you again."

Very early the next morning Vera went to see her sister Aimée; she did not feel sure she had been quite kind to her the night before. Aimée was

sleeping, but Nadine soon followed and awoke her; and then the two little wanderers began to tell their tales to Vera's eager ears.

Still she could not help caring a great deal more about Nadine's than about Aimée's adventures, and listening to her more attentively.

It was still very early when they had finished, and begged Vera to tell them *her* story. This was soon done—words were not needed to express the desolation she had felt, of which, in fact, she could not bear to speak. Nadine saw it in her altered face and in the trembling of her lips and hands—and, kissing her eagerly, exclaimed:

"Oh, Vera, darling (dushka), how could we ever leave you!"

"But you are with us now, Nadine,"

said Vera, "and we must all try to comfort poor Miss Rodney, who has suffered more than anyone. I have had *Te Deums* each day, and to-day, of course, we shall all three go to mass."

"Where are you going now, Vera?"

"To see Miss Rodney," replied Vera. "I had very nearly forgotten her."

She found her patient just waking up from a troubled sleep.

"Vera," said she, "have you been watching me?"

"No," replied Vera, "I am but just come."

"And have you dreamt?" asked the poor woman, eagerly. "I have had such a dream—oh, such a dream!" said she, entirely losing her usual manner. "I dreamt that I was on the brink of a river, that I saw Nadine and Aimée

drowning, and that I could not venture in to save them. Then you, Vera, appeared in the air, with wings, and carried up first one and then the other to heaven. Oh, are they dead? Have you any news of them? I awoke thinking I heard Nadine laugh, but, of course, it was in the dream."

"Dreams are always contrary to truth, you know," said Vera, earnestly. "I know that they are still living, and I believe that we shall see them soon; traces of both have been discovered, thank God!"

Miss Rodney was not a good physiognomist, but even she could not fail to notice the dancing, tearful light in Vera's eyes, very different to the glazed look of despair, only varied by a wild gleam of hope, the day before.

"What have you heard, Vera?—something more, I am sure. Was it?—no, it could not be Nadine's laugh!"

And she started up as if to go and see.

"No, no," said Vera, gently detaining her, "lie still, and I will tell you all I know."

And she began to do so, lengthening out the tale, by mentioning the motley crowd of boys and girls who had been brought for her to see, but who had not, of course, required examination, because at the same moment a smaller crowd had escorted a figure in a Turkish dress, who proved to be Aimée.

Of Aimée she could speak calmly, but she felt that to recount Nadine's return would be impossible. She therefore listened to Miss Rodney's earnest desire to see Aimée.

But Aimée refused to go to her.

Nadine was anxious, on the contrary, to nurse her as Vera did, and asked if she might venture in.

"No," said Vera, "she does not know you are here."

"But it might be a good way of telling her perhaps," said Nadine, "especially if I could go while she is asleep."

Vera agreed that they should give Miss Rodney time to fall asleep, and then Nadine might go and sit by her.

"She will not be impatient," said she, "for she will think that Aimée has still to dress herself, so we shall have time to go to church first."

"To church!" said Aimée and Nadine. "Oh, yes, there is the bell!—but why to-day?"

"I ordered it—I knew you would like it," said Vera, her voice shaking a little as she turned away her head for a moment; then quickly recovering, she begged her sisters to dress while she went to see how Nadine's deliverer had fared.

As Vera tripped across the wide court, looking so different from what it had done yesterday, did not the church bell find a glad echo in the young girl's heart?—and did not the blue sky seem to her tearful eyes bright with a divine smile of sympathy with her revived joy and peace?

As she drew near to the great house she thought with some trepidation of meeting her unknown friend, who had brought Nadine home; and she was inclined to turn

back, only that she felt he ought to be cared for, and that she had been, however unintentionally, but too remiss in paying him attention the night before.

He was not in the breakfast-room, but his coffee was, and Vera thought it would be a very convenient and suitable relief for her to have the occupation of pouring it out for him.

She therefore waited beside the noisy bubbling coffee-pot, watching the bright little atoms of charcoal in the furnace (a miniature of the Samovar furnace), and expecting with beating heart the arrival of her guest, and the opportunity of thanking him.

Incapable of remaining quiet, she clapped her hands and called "Chelovek," in answer to which summons a man appeared, the faithful Vacili; and she inquired of

him where her guest had slept, how he was, what arrangements had been made for his comfort, &c., &c., saying she was so sorry that she had not been able to think of them herself.

"Never fear, Vera Nicolaievna," was the reply, "I knew he had brought home our Basishna, and that you would wish him to be well cared for; so I" (with a low bow) "undertook the matter, and did my best."

"And the best was excellent," said another voice, "only too much care and attention were bestowed on me!"

And the stranger entered from the inner room, and, seeing Vera, bowed profoundly. Vera no less profoundly returned the salute.

"Vera Nicolaievna, I presume," said he.

"Yes," said Vera blushing, "Nadine's sister; and I am so very sorry I did not thank you last night for all you have done for us—nor even inquire about your room," added she, hesitating and colouring. "Were you very uncomfortable? I am afraid I did not speak to you, nor see you even! I beg your pardon!"

Her lips trembled, her eyes were full of tears, as she raised them and looked at Viatcheslav. To her surprise she saw him in the same condition. He tried three times to reply, but could not utter a sound, and both of them crimsoned violently—Vera all the more from seeing his eyes fixed earnestly upon her; but, with a woman's quick resource, she poured out the coffee, handed him the hot cream and fresh hot *bubliki*, and sat

down, in the shade of the coffee-pot, to conceal her still burning cheeks.

In order, however, not too much to prolong this silence, she spoke of Nadine's rescue, inquired how he had found her, expressed again her thankfulness, and conversation soon flowed smoothly between them.

Viatcheslav lingered over his second glass of coffee so long, that Vera began to be afraid she should be late for church, and rising at last, excused herself by saying that her sisters were waiting for her.

He asked if he might again see Nadine, and be introduced to Aimée; and Vera begged him to accompany them to chapel, which he accordingly did, and joined heartily in the *Te Deum* sung for the return of the little wanderers.

After church he took leave, although Vera begged him to stay and dine with them, saying—which was very true—that she expected her father every day, and that he would so much like to thank him in person.

"At all events," said she, smiling, "he will be in haste to become acquainted with you as soon as possible; so I hope you will come back when he is at home."

Viatcheslav assured her he should do so with much pleasure, and begged she would invite the General to bring Nadine once more to the "gloomy fortress" where she had been captured. He spoke gaily, but Nadine, blushing bright red, said, very seriously, that she never should forget her first visit there, and the great kindness he had shown to her; and she put up her glowing little face to kiss

him. Aimée received an embrace also, and Vera a distant bow, as profound as that of the morning; but she gave him her hand, and, thanking him once more with a voice full of emotion, saw him step into his travelling-carriage and drive away.

When they returned from church poor Miss Rodney was asleep, so they went to see Tais and her brother. Nadine was so delighted with little Ta that she would hardly bear to leave her, even when her favourite "*Varinki à la creme aigre*" awaited her for breakfast, flanked by chicken cutlets, new potatoes, and two immense dishes of cherries.

The breakfast was cheerful, and Vera had now time to hear many little details of her sister's adventures, which had not till now been told her.

Aimée was mortified, however, that no mention of her being lost, no allusion to her wanderings, was ever made; and if she herself spoke of them, Vera coloured and looked so much annoyed that she stopped abashed. Nadine even seemed to find the subject a difficult one to reply to, and the three little girls sat silent and constrained until Vera again asked Nadine some question that awakened the recollection of all her adventures, and set the tide of her eloquence once more flowing.

The sisters were still discussing this interesting topic, when a feeble voice was heard to ask for Vera in the next room. It was Miss Rodney's.

Vera instantly attending to this summons, found the poor invalid just awake and asking her attendant what merry

sounds they were that she heard from the school-room. The maid hastily replied that the young ladies were there at breakfast.

Miss Rodney, as soon as Vera appeared, eagerly asked, not news of the fugitives, but of the breakfast; and hearing of the *Varinki à la creme*, insisted so earnestly upon having some, that Vera, as she might now safely do so, indulged her, and watched the consumption of these delicacies by an appetite not a a little voracious. Thinking then that the sight of Nadine would not shock nerves so well fortified, she sent her a private message to bring some cherries into the room.

Nadine thereupon, in her usual bold, careless manner, curiously chequered by something of confusion and shame, and

even anxiety as to the alteration she expected to see in her unhappy governess, made her appearance, quite suddenly.

Miss Rodney, was one of those hard-featured persons who are little altered by illness; even traces of fever could not make her small blue eyes look large and dark, as eyes in a wasted face usually do. She started a little on seeing Nadine, and seemed troubled, no less than her pupil, by varying and conflicting feelings. However, she extended her hand, to welcome the truant home.

Vera turned away. It was, if not an unkind, at least a cold welcome for the erring child; and the tears of penitence that had swelled in Nadine's black eyes receded and left the defiant look that Vera knew so well. She sprang forward, feeling that there was no time to be lost,

and, taking Nadine's hand, pressed it lovingly, and looked into her face with an expression that said plainly, "Do not turn back now;" and the softer glances returned, and Nadine suffered herself to be drawn to her governess's bedside, and there to kneel down, while Vera said, "Nadine has come to beg your pardon, Miss Rodney." Then her proud little head bent forward, and her impetuous heart beat rapidly, as she murmured, "Forgive me—I have been very naughty!"

Miss Rodney was quite overcome, and sobbed out her forgiveness; and even went so far as to say that, perhaps, henceforth they might be happier together.

A sudden pang seemed, at this moment, to cross her mind. She asked for Aimée, and, having embraced her, begged

them all to leave her for an hour and then return, as she had something to say to them.

At the end of an hour they found her dressed and lying on her bed—rather weak, but still wonderfully recovered. She had a letter in her hand, and, motioning to the three little girls to sit down, she thus addressed them :—

"My dear children—I have received a letter lately from your sister. She has done me the great kindness of inviting me to spend some time with her in St. Petersburgh. It is by no means impossible that I may be of great assistance to her. I suspect she is thinking of giving your little niece an English governess, and will require me to choose one with a good accent for her."

At this Nadine gave an impatient grunt,

but Vera checked her with a look, and the governess went on:

"This being the case, my dears, I shall leave you almost directly, and your sister will send a substitute to take my place during my absence. I hope she will appreciate you all, and that you will give her no needless trouble. Heaven knows, you have given me sorrow enough!"

Here her voice was lost in tears. Her distress, whether real, feigned, or exaggerated, told upon the sensitive minds of her pupils, and there was such a general outburst of sobbing and of pocket-handkerchiefs, that the doctor's entrance was not perceived. As soon as he spoke, however, the three little maidens retreated.

They were there again immediately his visit was over, when Miss Rodney in-

formed them that she had not near finished all that she had to say to them, and, pulling herself up on her pillows and clearing her throat, thus continued:

"My dear young ladies, you will not, I presume, be surprised to hear, that after your late conduct I am by no means disposed to retain the charge of you longer than necessary; and as the interview I have just had with the doctor induces me to consider change of air to be immediately desirable for me, I shall lose no time in preparing to follow his advice."

Nadine and Aimée here shot congratulatory glances at each other; the elder of these two girls, though horribly ashamed of herself, burst into a violent fit of laughter, and Aimée tittered. Vera's exclamation, "Oh, Nadine!" checked

them, however, and Miss Rodney went on:

"Whether I return to you or not, I think it is well to improve this solemn occasion by addressing to you a few suitable words."

This announcement had the effect of lengthening considerably the three little faces opposite to her, for the children knew pretty well what Miss Rodney's few words on solemn occasions were.

Great was therefore their relief, and great the discomfiture of the orator, when the impending discourse was again interrupted by the sound of bells, whilst at the same moment Vacili, entering the room, announced with a bow that his Excellency the General had arrived.

The three little girls had no sooner heard these words than they rushed out

to meet him, kissed his hand, his cheek, and then his hand again, and received in return his most affectionate caresses.

Dmitri and Tais also came out, and were kindly and heartily welcomed.

Not a word was said of past troubles. All seemed disposed to enjoy the return of the long absent father and master, and the servants hastened the midday repast.

Scarcely, however, was the General seated at dinner—in fact the little pies were still going round, when a carriage with eight horses drove up to the door. The General looked vexed; he was a very fond father, and would rather have sat after dinner smiling on his three little daughters, or chatting with them between the whiffs of his long pipe, than have visitors to entertain.

"How tiresome!" said Nadine.

Aimée shrugged her shoulders, and Vera looked at her father.

Tais pitied them all, and thought if she had a father, and he were just returned, it would be hard to be obliged to receive visitors. The visitors, however, entered, and a cry of pleasure arose, for the new arrival was a married daughter of the house—not the beloved Hélène indeed, but the third sister, Svetlana.

She was a bright, lively being, and very dear to her young sisters, who immediately crowded round her. She was not handsome, but she dressed well; her fair hair was well arranged, her shady complexion, relieved by the colouring of her dress, and her somewhat stout but good figure, allowed her to

wear with grace a beautiful Cashmere shawl.

She made her way straight to her father, kissed his hand, cheek, and hand again, just as the little girls had done, and turned to introduce the lady who followed her, Madame Bereti.

Then began that rapid, varied, and eloquent discourse, which must be heard to be appreciated—pure Russian, darting in and out of as pure French, nay, sometimes even the one tongue helped out with a word from the other.

Madame Bereti listened and looked amused, but did not speak much. She was tall and slight, with regular features, black hair, and a pale, calm face; her large gray eyes, dark almost as night, were finely fringed with long lashes—they had not the fire and brilliancy,

however, of real black eyes; the lady, besides, was above thirty, nearer forty perhaps, and certainly at that age the lustre of one's glance is somewhat dimmed. There was a look of repose about her that was agreeable, and, when amused, her countenance lighted up very pleasantly, whilst a word or two from her lips would kindle sparks of thought in other speakers.

Vera now listened to this lady with much pleasure, while Nadine and Aimée pressed round their sister, asking all sorts of questions about her journey, and about their little nephew, whom they had never seen.

At length the General rose up suddenly, thereby dispersing the whole company, which was, be it observed, very numerous. There were not, it is true,

many of the family present, but as is usual in a Russian household, there were at least eight or nine dependents of rank sufficient to make a pleasant society, and to furnish good table-talk.

This party had been smoking together in twos or threes since the coffee had been handed round; but on the General's departure to take his daily siesta, most of them followed his example, and the ladies withdrew to their rooms.

Svetlana, passing her arm round Nadine's waist, accompanied the little girls to their school-room. They were delighted, and bustled about to show her all their treasures and pets. Nadine ran to fetch the monkey, Aimée looked for the hedgehog, and Vera went to call the tame doe.

Meantime, Svetlana, who was not a

very ceremonious person, knocked at Miss Rodney's door, and on hearing the expected, "Come in," entered the room, introduced herself, inquired after her health in a few rapid words, seated herself near the bed, and briefly informed her that she had brought Madame Bereti to Garasavka, and would be happy to convey Miss Rodney to her own house, which was about sixty versts distant on the Moscow road — that from thence she would send her by the earliest opportunity to St. Petersburgh, whither it was likely that one of her family would be proceeding ere long.

Miss Rodney drew herself up in a dignified manner, and muttered something about not forsaking her responsibilities until relieved by a formally appointed successor.

"Oh, as to that," said Svetlana, smiling, "I am armed with full powers, and your duly appointed successor is already in the house. I am come to ask you if you would like to see her?"

A flush of pale rage crossed the unlovely features of the offended Englishwoman, and she exclaimed that she did not wish to make any new acquaintances.

Svetlana rose and bowed, smilingly, saying, "Will you be ready at six tomorrow morning? I will send Antonina to help you in packing up. Stay, do you want anything ordered from the laundry?"

"No, thank you," said Miss Rodney, "as it is the Fête Verte the laundry is closed, and I have everything at home."

CHAPTER VIII.

SVETLANA passing into the next room, found there only the younger children, with their pets. She asked where Vera was, and was told that she was with Tais.

The two young girls were, in fact, entertaining Madame Bereti, who had been quite forgotten by everybody till Tais, whom Vera soon joined, engaged her in conversation.

Svetlana was glad to find them both together, and begged them to accompany her to the school-room. There she formally introduced Madame Bereti to the scene of her future labours, and the little girls to their future governess, who surprised Aimée by an affectionate kiss. She then embraced Vera; and gave Nadine a still more fervent caress. This flurried poor little Nadine, who, in spite of her high spirits, had a sort of pariah fear that her new governess would be made acquainted with her past adventures.

Madame Bereti then asked if she might see Miss Rodney, and, on Vera obtaining her assent, she went to her room.

Now, thought Nadine, she will hear all!

Svetlana observed that Nadine looked

uneasy, but, not knowing her story, did not understand why.

Meantime Vera, having introduced the new potentate to her predecessor, left them together, and returned to Svetlana, who, always curious, was just beginning to inquire more particularly into their relations with Miss Rodney.

Nadine at first rather shyly replied, by many piquant anecdotes; but Svetlana led her on, and soon the little girl, in her excitement, ran on a great deal faster and more volubly than was at all necessary, or than Vera thought fair.

Meantime, the amiable subject of these amusing sallies of the child's well-earned dislike was employing her time by trying to impress Madame Bereti with the difficulties of her new position. She was

also anxious too to find out whether Madame Bereti's engagement was temporary or permanent. She did not descend to the vulgarity of asking how many rubles a year she was to receive; but she put as many leading questions as she possibly could.

Madame Bereti, not very favourably impressed by this specimen of the lady's taste and manners, took her leave as soon as possible, and, as she re-entered the school-room, caught an anxious glance from Nadine.

Whatever, however, she had heard of this little girl did not seem to have indisposed her towards her; she was, in fact, perfectly cordial and agreeable to them all three, spent the afternoon, until they were called to tea, entertaining them with divers tales of her travels,

and succeeded in becoming very tolerably acquainted with them.

Miss Rodney did not appear that evening. Antonina was summoned to assist her in her packing, and bore away in triumph, her face grinning with delight, a heap of old garments, exclaiming at the same time, "Look! look! Nadejda Nicolaievna, what the English lady has given me! All this!"

"Dirty rubbish!" said Nadine, disdainfully.

Madame Bereti looked up rather quickly.

"Is it not better," said she, gently, "that the poor girl should be pleased with it?"

"Perhaps it is," said Nadine, colouring quickly. "Oh, they are beautiful, Antonina!"

Antonina left the room delighted, and

Nadine turned to Madame Bereti, who was looking very grave.

"Was that right?" said she, carelessly.

"No," said Madame Bereti, "I did not ask you to say what you did not think; and as you had just told her the contrary you did not spare her feelings. But," said she, willing to change the subject, "how pretty is the way in which Russian servants address their superiors! It is much prettier than the Miss, Mademoiselle, or Fraülein, which you would be called if you were English, French, or German."

"I do not think it is prettier than Signorina, or Señorita," said Vera; "and the real translation of the word 'Barishna' is very ungraceful."

"Oh!" said Aimée, laughing, "I think

it is such fun to listen to all the different languages at the table—Russian, French, and English of course; German to Herr Tinkel, and Spanish to Count Morales, and now and then Italian, but very seldom, only when little Bertoni is here."

Madame Bereti laughed.

"And I have heard Polish and Latin also," said she, "besides all the languages you have mentioned."

"Where?" asked Nadine quickly; "here or at Hélène's?"

"At your sister's house, and at several others," said she, smiling; "and here to-day."

"To-day?" said Nadine, astonished. "Who was speaking Latin to-day?"

"Those two gentlemen at the end of the table; I think they were Poles," said Madame Bereti.

"Oh, yes, I daresay they were the doctor and papa's secretary. I had forgotten that they had returned with him," said Nadine; "but you said in several other houses—have you, then, been long in Russia?"

"I have been in Russia for some time now, and this is my second visit. On the former occasion I did not go to St. Petersburgh at all—in fact, I lived in the country the whole of the first year."

"And the second year?" said Nadine, observing that Madame Bereti made a half pause.

"The second year," said she, "I spent in Kiev." She lowered her voice, sighing gently.

The children saw that for some reason or another Madame Bereti did not wish

to enlarge upon this portion of her life. She quickly recovered herself, however, and went on:

"That was in the south of Russia; nevertheless the climate was too severe, and I left, and went to the shores of the Mediterranean, since which time I have spent two winters in St. Petersburgh and a summer in Moscow; so that I feel pretty well acquainted with Russia."

"And do you like it?" said Nadine, eagerly.

Vera listened attentively for the reply.

"Indeed I do," said Madame Bereti.

At this moment a servant was sent to call them to the great house, where the family and visitors were assembling

for tea, and they hastened to obey the summons.

After tea the little girls were asked to play and exhibit their characteristic dances, which they willingly did — Aimée dancing a cachuca, Nadine a tarantella, and Vera a Greek dance. These performances were remarkably well executed, and Madame Bereti was much amused by looking on—so much, indeed, that she did not at first observe that she was no longer alone.

Beside her sat a middle-aged man, with his head on one side, his hair parted very much on one side, and his eyes glittering with a peculiar expression, looking — at least, such was the effect produced—very much on one side also. There was an inquisitive air in the whole appearance of this singular

person--something of the sage, dubious look of an experienced cockatoo. As soon as he succeeded in catching the eye of the lady, he delivered himself of a volley of questions:

"Have you been long here, madame? Are you thinking of staying? Do you like the looks of the family? Perhaps you have known them long—have you? Ah, well! ah, well!—but the flower of the flock is not here, Madame Hélène—she is the flower of the flock, there is none like her; ask the General — ask the General. Ah! you should see her. Vera is very well, and Svetlana is not plain, but Hélène is the one you should see."

"Sir!" said Madame Bereti, "if you mean Madame la Comtesse Verstov, the Princesse Tolstoi, I have the honour

of knowing her, and I think Mademoiselle Vera will be very like her."

He looked abashed for a moment, but quickly recovering himself with a laugh, went on thus:

"You are very respectful, but it is not at all necessary—besides, I am a privileged person; she does not think anything, I assure you, of her titles, and laughs at those who make too much of them. You had better do as I do, and leave them off."

Madame Bereti bowed stiffly, and did not appear disposed to prolong the conversation, but she had fallen in with an enemy who was not willing to let her off so easily.

"You are clever, madame," said he, looking at her, and still speaking French;

"you are here, perhaps, on some literary undertaking: well, you will not find a pleasanter family than this to live in if you wish to see Russian country life. But you should go to the capital—go to the capital; I don't think you will gain much here. I surprise you—you are surprised at my free ways, but I am a privileged person—a privileged person; they all let me do and say what I like, and so I am going to get——"

What he was going to get never transpired, for the lively strains of the mazurka now sounded, and he was claimed as a partner by Aimée.

As he was led off to the dance Madame Bereti revolved in her mind what could be the nation, position, and education of the strange man. He was

as inquisitive as an American, but he had not quite the right accent; he was as lively as a Pole or a Frenchman, yet he had not the manner of either the one or the other; in short, she was fairly puzzled, and could not help watching his somewhat grotesque movements as he was whirled round in the wild dance by his little partner, who had not herself the same grace in this that she had exhibited in the other dances.

While watching them she was however herself invited to join them. But she shook her head laughing, and said that her dancing days were over.

"Nonsense," said he who addressed her, "it is your cavalier that does not please you."

So saying, he smiled, and showed a row of pearly teeth, and looked indeed

very handsome, but also perfectly well aware of the fact.

She therefore answered him in his own light style, and presently saw him careering round with Nadine.

"It is not the first time that you have seen this dance?" said a voice at her elbow, and, turning, she saw Dmitri, the brother of Tais.

"Oh! no," said she, "I have even danced it."

"Ah! I did not know that it was known in England."

"Nor is it," said Madame Bereti, with a peculiar smile, "but that need not prevent my having seen it and danced it in Moscow and St. Petersburgh."

"And what do you think of our two capitals?" said he. "Of course you prefer the latter?"

"Why of course? Do you mean what you say? No, every Russian must prefer Moscow."

"Because St. Petersburgh is more like any other town?"

"No, that is often said, but I do not think that it is like any other town. Where else do you see gilded and star-spotted domes, rising in the midst of such quays, such perspectives, such magnificent buildings? Where else can you see these domes draped in snow, or glittering under the pale blue of that eerie-looking northern sky. I think the individuality of Petersburgh sufficiently marked; but Moscow is far more interesting, and I don't wonder that all Russians love it."

"Do they?" said Dmitri, with an absent look and a sigh which, though

smothered, was not inaudible, and seemed to tell of some deep sorrow.

Madame Bereti looked at him, and thought what talent, what genius, that quiet, melancholy countenance probably hides! — and how handsome he would be did not an air of suffering so cloud the expression of his face!

He was at this moment following with his eyes the light, graceful figure of his sister Tais, as she floated lightly, as it seemed, on the music of the bewitching mazurka.

Aimée and her partner were the next couple that passed, and Madame Bereti asked who it was she was dancing with.

"Do you not know?" answered Dmitri, almost smiling. "Is it possible that you do not know little Rosier—*de* Rosier he

calls himself—the lively little man of Brussels, who keeps every one in order, because his duty is—can you guess what it is?"

"To teach dancing, perhaps, or music."

"Not at all. To teach the exact sciences, and to take down the variations of the barometer.!"

Madame Bereti laughed—she could not help it—and Dmitri really echoed her laugh—faintly.

"The General," continued he, "is very scientific, and though he has an excellent librarian, who is in correspondence with most of the learned societies of Europe, he was anxious to obtain the services of some gentleman still more profoundly learned!"

"And this is the result," said Madame Bereti. "But *is* he clever?"

"He has not the slightest knowledge, I will not say only of science, but of subjects with which all but the most ignorant are acquainted. I will give you an instance:—Some one had spoken of the system of Copernicus, when he said he always liked the tropic of Cancer best—it was an easier name."

"But how could such a person be sent here?"

"It was an extraordinary mistake. But remark the goodness and liberality of the General—*because* this poor man is a complete failure, he will not send him away; for he says that he is a good fellow, and who would take him if dismissed?"

"I suppose no one, indeed; but how very generous, and what a fine trait it exhibits of Russian character."

"You are a very indulgent traveller. Russia is not often thus treated."

"Russia is very little known, notwithstanding all the books that are written and published about it. You would be surprised to find how ignorant we in the West still are of all that concerns your country."

"How do you account for this?"

"Principally by the barrier language interposes between Russia and foreign countries. You can never fairly judge a people till you can at least read what they say of themselves, and what they write to amuse or instruct their own country people."

"And by the want of familiar intercourse with these people?"

"Yes—but I am speaking more especially of those who remain at home

and cannot visit the country. They depend upon translations of the literature of the country, and upon the accounts of travellers, who on their side, meeting with immense difficulties, partly in consequence of their ignorance of the language, lose patience, and paint in flaming colours, drawing from imagination, what they have in reality neither seen nor experienced. Their information, from the same cause, is extremely superficial, and they do not give themselves time, by personal enquiry, to correct any preconceived impressions, drawn from other writers, whose errors they perpetuate."

"But you are very partial; perhaps these authors are right, and we *are* very 'barbaric'—is not that the word? And if you wrote a book to prove that

we are not so bad after all, would you not be regarded as a *tête montée*, or an agent of the government?"

"No, no, no," laughed Madame Bereti, "we are not so bad as that; but perhaps my book might not succeed, if I stated exactly what I think about Russia."

"I wish you would," said a tall, distinguished-looking person, the husband of Svetlana, who had been listening for a moment or two to them; "I dare-say we should read your book with great interest. But you do not really mean that you find as much comfort here as in England or France?" he continued.

"Not the same kind of comfort, perhaps—less finish and fewer inventions, but an abundance of things that we consider not comforts, but luxuries."

"Stoves, for instance, and pineapples!" said Ivan Petrovitch, smiling.

"All foreigners are struck with our pineapples and water-melons," cried De Rosier, who had joined the group.

"Oh, if you descend to such items as these, add perfumes, tea, coffee, ices, the lacteal, and cereal of all kinds, which are incomparably better here than they are to be found elsewhere."

"And cigars," added he delighted, "and wine, and pigs——"

He was evidently determined to enlarge on all Russia's inferior advantages, but as Madame Bereti, though agreeing with him, could not base her admiration of the country on such considerations, she was not sorry when he was interrupted by a summons to dance.

Later in the evening she was told that De Rosier considered her the most intelligent of travellers in Russia, whereat she laughed heartily, for he had scarcely let her open her lips upon the real superiorities of the country.

Returning to her after the dance, this gentleman somewhat abruptly asked, if she should like to marry and settle in Russia?

Half amused—for he was not a person to be angry with—she replied that it would require very deep consideration before any one would voluntarily become the subject of another country than her own.

"True, an Englishwoman would lose a great deal."

"Every one would run the risk of doing so. The ills of our own country

are, at all events, known to us; but we dread pledging ourselves to the unknown. If you understood English, I would quote Shakespeare to that effect; so perhaps it is well for you that you do not."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed he, "'rosbif'—I know that—and 'water-cart;' and that is all!"

"It is curious," continued Madame Bereti, "that in Russia, which is so much more remote from England than France, English should be more studied than in France: but so it is."

"Is it?" said Dmitri, who had returned to her, and was standing near. "I am ashamed to say I know but very few words; not perhaps Rosier's selection exactly," added he, smiling, "but I should be at a loss to ask for anything beyond

what is most ordinary, such as beer, bread, &c."

"Yet you know more than that, a great deal. So many English words have been Russianized that you would be surprised to find how many you know."

She mentioned several that had never before struck him, which so interested him that he sat down and pursued the subject, till again called away.

"Good-bye," said he. "Perhaps when you have done with Aimée you will teach Ta, will you?"

This was a great deal from him, and she readily promised to comply with his wish.

Being now tired, she left the gay scene, in order to retire to rest. A request, however, from Miss Rodney induced her to visit that lady first. She found her

dressed, but lying on her bed, her trunks half packed, and all about her betokening a speedy removal.

CHAPTER IX.

"Sit down," said Miss Rodney, hastily, to Madame Bereti. "Have you really courage to undertake this charge?"

"I really have," said Madame Bereti, smiling.

"And do the children know in what capacity you are here?"

"Yes, I suppose so. I did not think of inquiring whether they understood it or not," she answered gravely; and the rather bitterly put question provoked no

smile this time—for she felt for the dethroned monarch."

"You can form no idea of what they are," continued Miss Rodney. "I do think living in a country house is dreadful! One is quite at the mercy of the owners, and of the misrepresentations made to them by the children, especially where they are as wild as these—and that is no small evil. I will never live out of a town again; and I am sure you would not, if you knew what this life is."

"I have lived in different parts of Russia," quietly replied Madame Bereti, "and I have never found it disagreeable in any way. I know no other country where one is so sure to be well and kindly treated. Surely Mademoiselle Vera is gentle, and the General all you can wish? As to the little ones, I daresay

they are troublesome; but one can always mould them at that age."

"They are very wicked, though so young," replied Miss Rodney. "Nadine is a very desperate character, Aimée a confirmed hypocrite, and Vera horribly affected!"

"Oh! pray do not say such things. I wish to hear no ill of them. I saw no affectation, at all events."

She then turned the conversation to Miss Rodney's health, and this produced the history of Nadine's and Aimée's escapades—at least as much of them as Miss Rodney herself knew, which was not much; for she was ill when Nadine returned, and the arrivals of the General and his guests had so quickly succeeded each other, that she had, in fact, heard but very little.

However, Svetlana had already got the whole account from Nadine herself, and had confided it to Madame Bereti, who begged her not to let the little girl know that she had done so, lest she should lose all hope of making for herself a new character.

Svetlana promised, but, being very giddy, alluded to it so often before Madame Bereti, that she must have been very dull not to have *guessed* it at last, even had she not been told.

Madame Bereti now wished to leave Miss Rodney, but found it impossible to do so.

At length the ex-governess asked her if she knew for what hour the carriage had been ordered.

"At six o'clock," said Madame Bereti.

Whereupon Miss Rodney declared she

should not be ready, and re-commenced her packing.

It was well that her visitor helped her; for illness had so unnerved the poor woman that she sat down several times to rest, and her trembling hands could scarcely lay anything straight in the boxes.

When all was done, Madame Bereti begged her to try to sleep; but the agitation of Miss Rodney had now reached its climax, and she burst into tears. She blamed herself for her ill-fortune, as she called it, and told Madame Bereti to keep her pupils in awe, especially at first; Russian children, she said, were so artful—"Hold them tight; I was too indulgent!"

Madame Bereti shook her head. "I had the same advice once before," she replied, "and I tried it."

"Did it not answer?"

"No; I was more miserable than I can tell you, and so were the children. At last, as I wanted so much to love them, I could bear it no longer, when, luckily, if I may so speak, they fell ill. Then was the time to change my system. I laid aside all severity, of course, and no one reprimanded me; and when they recovered, I told their parents I could only, by winning their affections and confidence, gain any moral ascendancy over them. Nor have I ever attempted to do so since. Russian children are like all others—they have hearts; and it is by love, not fear, hearts are gained."

Miss Rodney listened attentively.

"And have you never failed?"

"I have not. One young girl did not appear to yield much to my me-

thod; for some time she required constant watching, and I could not trust her; but she became all at once when I was ill, all that the tenderest little sister could have been; she not only tended me at all hours, but also pursued her own studies, and was far more diligent and in all respects more considerate and careful to please me than I had ever hoped to see her, for she was nearly grown up when I first knew her, and I never expected to see so radical a change in her character."

"Ah, but these children are different!" exclaimed Miss Rodney; "you will never get any hold upon them now. And Madame Hélène is worse than any of them!"

Madame Bereti rose to go.

"I cannot bear this!—good night," said

she. "I sleep next door to you; if I can help you call me, but do not speak thus of Madame Hélène."

And she left the room.

She had not been long gone when she heard groans in Miss Rodney's room, and going into it, found the poor thing in great distress; there was still to be sure much angry feeling mixed therewith, yet the unhappy governess was more susceptible of comfort, and clung to Madame Bereti's consolations and assurances that she should not be evil spoken of by the children after her departure.

Madame Bereti would not leave her patient again, but remained with her until a servant brought her coffee, and told her the carriage and Madame Svetlana were ready.

"I will not see the children," said she; but the door of Vera's room opened, and that little damsel appeared on the threshhold, pale from last night's fatigue, but dressed for going out.

"I am going with you as far as Xiloni Zerkov," said she, "and papa will meet me there and come back with me."

She spoke cheerfully, but her voice shook a little. There was yet a little delay before Svetlana had finished her coffee, and Vera made use of it to beg Miss Rodney's pardon again for herself and her sisters, and to inquire about her health.

Svetlana appeared before Miss Rodney's agitation allowed her to reply.

"Good morning, Madame Bereti," exclaimed she gaily, as she got into the

carriage, "good morning, Miss Rodney; ready, Vera?"

She gave the word in Russian, and off dashed the six superb chesnuts, slowly followed by the oxen-drawn waggon, laden with boxes bearing the name "MARIA RODNEY," in large white letters glaring in the sun, as these the last vestiges of her existence among the inhabitants of Garasavka disappeared.

"I shall carry her off directly to wait at my house," Svetlana had said a day or two before to Madame Bereti; "I see she will do no good here—her presence irritates the children like a perpetual blister."

These words recurred to Madame Bereti's mind when, later on that morning, having dressed, but not yet left her room, she heard the shout of joy

which followed Antonina's entrance to awaken her little Barishnie. Evidently she had told the news, and as evidently it was unexpected by the little girls.

In another moment Nadine rushed, in her night-dress, into the school-room, seized the paper of regulations, tore it down the middle, and danced frantically round the room with the fragments in her hand. She then darted into Miss Rodney's apartment; but there she found the door open into that of her new governess, whose eye met hers, when she was at once arrested by its mild look of reproof.

"Poor Miss Rodney," said Madame Bereti, "she was very unhappy here last night!"

Nadine's quick little heart was touched.

"Why was she unhappy? At leaving us?"

"Not only at leaving you—that is bad enough when people have been happy together, but it is far worse if they have not been so."

"I should think that was a great relief—Good-bye, God bless you!—that's done with!"

"Yes, if they could be indifferent to each other; but you know, my dear little girl, that people who live together cannot be indifferent—they must make or mar all happiness for each other."

"And did we mar hers?"

Madame Bereti only replied very gently,

"I was not here—you must know best."

"But she quite destroyed ours too," said Nadine, gloomily—"don't you think she did?"

"I must know you better before I answer that question," said Madame Bereti, putting a cloak round Nadine; "for of course I care more about your happiness than that of your governess; it is for your sake I want to discover how you might have lived happily with her."

Nadine looked up.

"I am sure I shall with you," said she, "for I shall love you, and——I hope you won't be unhappy either," added she, awkwardly.

Madame Bereti kissed her.

"I am sure you will not make me so," she said, "and I shall try to make you very happy indeed, and hope in

time you will love me; but I am not sure, for you know I must do things you will dislike, and children are not always as generous as dogs and elephants, who love those that hurt them for their good."

"Do they?" asked Nadine, amused.

Madame Bereti told her several well-known anecdotes to prove the truth of her assertion, and Nadine remembered some instances of the like kind that she had herself witnessed.

Thus the time passed so rapidly that she was quite surprised when the little clock struck nine.

"You must go and dress," said Madame Bereti; "we must start earlier in future, but to-day is not quite a regular day. Go and dress, and then you must come and show me all your books and rules.

Why is that paper so torn?" asked she, pointing to the fragments of the "Regulations," which Nadine still held mechanically.

"Oh! because she's gone!—she's gone, and it's all over now!" cried Nadine, in a wild gay tone, that made Madame Bereti fear she had produced no impression at all upon her.

"Do you want it?" said the little girl, suddenly recollecting herself, and reddening, as she laid the fragments on the table.

"I will try not to forget if you will kiss me," whispered she, as Aimée knocked at the door, and said, "I will go and dress."

"I wonder," thought she, "if Madame Bereti really knows anything about me. She seems to think I may do well—

heigho!—I should like to have a good character with somebody."

"Does Aimée know her governess is gone?" thought Madame Bereti, as that small personage knocked at the open door, and, on being told to come in, ran round the empty room, and held up her cheek to be kissed.

"Is Miss Rodney gone?" asked she, "and are you really going to be our governess? I am so glad! I am glad, you see, Madame, for I like you better than Miss Rodney, and you are prettier also."

"Hush, Aimée, I cannot hear what is not true, and little girls should never praise older people."

"Why not?—and what have I said that is not true?—you are unkind. I shan't like you!"

"Come into the garden this lovely morning, while Nadine is dressing," said her governess, willing to change the subject.

"May I? Oh! thank you. The bells are ringing; shall I show you the chapel?"

"Yes, pray do."

They went in. Aimée, with surprise, saw her governess kneel beside her in prayer, and, on coming out again, said to her,

"Are you a Greek?"

"No. But why do you ask? I must go in again, and see the pictures, for as the service was going on I did not like to look about me."

"But it is not your Church, why do you kneel down there?"

"Because it is a Christian Church, and I always pray in every church I

enter, for it is the place in which God has pleased to put His Name."

Aimée made no comment until they entered the garden, and then she said,

"Will you come to church with us always?"

"Probably I shall—do you attend service every day?"

"Oh, no! but very often though, and—"

Whatever Aimée was going to say was lost, for she ran forwards to meet Nadine and to ask where Vera was. Madame Bereti told them. Breakfast followed, and then plans for the future; new regulations were drawn out, as like the old ones as possible in all that was good, and as unlike them where they were merely vexatious and galling. They were few and simple; and the books then

in use were all continued, but new ways of employing them introduced.

"Oh, that History of Greece," said Nadine, "how I hate it! I have learnt it through twice."

"Have you?" said Madame Bereti, "then I will give you a copy-book, with mythological and historical notes and allusions on one side and blank on the other, and you shall fill them up. If you do it well, I shall send it to England; for I know some one there who has a similar plan for other countries, and would like to have more; so you see you will help me very much."

Nadine's History of Greece became much more interesting to her after this change of plan, and she learnt to combine several branches of learning in one.

The children knew very well what they had learnt, yet it was but little; for they had learnt all by rote. However, this plan had its advantages, and the new governess did not discontinue it, but tried, as with the History of Greece, to add to each lesson something to quicken attention and to awaken curiosity.

Sometimes, in the evenings, she would bring out a catalogue of pictures, and make the children describe the proper accessories of each. This would delight them all; and Vera, who was very clever with her pencil, often sketched off very spirited groups.

The evenings thus passed were by no means the least agreeable.

On this particular day, however, Madame Bereti found it quite sufficient to draw up time-tables, &c., for Nadine and

Aimée, reserving Vera's to be arranged with the young girl herself on her return.

It was already late, and the long shadows lay upon the grass, when Vera and her father returned; for Svetlana had persuaded them to drive on as far as her house and dine with her. It was a long day for her, and Vera was quite tired enough to enjoy lying down on a sofa, and talking to her sisters and Madame Bereti till supper-time.

It is not necessary to follow, step by step, the efforts and the progress of Madame Bereti towards gaining an influence over the three little girls. To Nadine she had felt herself much drawn from the very first. Aimée had appeared to like her very much, until convicted once or twice of attempting to deceive. Reproofs seemed to estrange her, while they

had rather the contrary effect upon Nadine. Vera seldom required them : she fulfilled her duties, and was generally quiet and obedient. Yet she did not seem to be happy. If Madame Bereti looked at her in church, she generally saw her in tears; if she passed through her room when the young girl was asleep, she saw traces of tears and lines of sorrow on her face. She seemed to make no progress in gaining her confidence.

Vera listened to all she said, acquiesced in every remark or suggestion, was lively when with her sisters, but relapsed into pensive silence, or mere lip words, directly they left her, often indulging herself in a suppressed, but not unremarked, sigh.

The three girls either went to church or read the Psalms and the Gospel with

Madame Bereti every day, who taught them also to sing some of our finest church music, and encouraged them to study their own, which is not so much cultivated in home-life in Russia as it deserves to be.

One evening, when the whole party were walking out, after singing "He shall feed his flock," Madame Bereti asked Vera if that portion of Scripture was translated into Russian, and advised her, if not, to attempt the translation.

Vera, adopting this hint, quickly made a version of the chapter, which went very well with the air already adapted to the English.

"How pretty," said Nadine, "that air is. One quite sees the lambs feeding!"

"Oh!" replied Aimée, "and 'carried in His arms,' too; but I do not understand it all."

"Not the second part? It is from the Gospel," said Madame Bereti. "The Gospel, you know, tells how the prophecies were fulfilled."

"How is it so in this case?" asked Vera, earnestly.

"'He shall feed, and lead, and bear them in His arms;' that is the promise in the figurative language of prophecy, where the Shepherd and His flock are alone mentioned. But would this suffice for the real Shepherd's care of His flock? What do we require most?"

"Daily bread for soul and body, as you said this morning," said Vera, smiling; "and do we need leading for soul and body too?"

"What does the prayer you have quoted go on to ask?"

"Forgiveness," said Vera, "and lead ——yes, there it is, 'Lead us not into temptation'—which I know you said means, keep us out of temptation."

"That is like leading tenderly the weak and the weary that they fall not, is it not, dear Vera? Like, too, the invitation, 'Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'"

"Is not this the fulfilment of the prophecy?"

All the children had pressed closer round the governess as she spoke, and were silent for a minute or two. Nadine and Aimée then dropped behind, and Vera, putting her hands to her face, no longer restrained her tears.

Turning into another path, Madame Bereti said gently to the poor child,

"Vera, dear, tell Him whatever you have to bear—He will help you to bear it. Give Him your heart."

"It is my own fault," said Vera—"I cannot say with all my heart, God's will be done—in—in—"

"In depriving you of your sister? Dear Vera, it is a very severe trial, but He can give you strength."

"It is not only that—I thought I was more humble about it, and now I am as bad as ever again. I do not care for anything as I should do: I care less about church, and am even—" she hesitated. "Even when we are with you I cannot help wishing all the time Hélène were here to read with us as she used to do. Do not be angry; no one is like Hélène."

"No, indeed, dear Vera, no one is like her, and, far from being angry, I am glad you see that so clearly, and will therefore grow more and more like her yourself."

"Am I like her? Do you know her well?" asked Vera, brightening up.

"I do know Madame Hélène well and admire her very much, and I do think you very like her; but that, you know, darling, is not to be the likeness most desired by you, is it?"

"No," said Vera, colouring, "but I feel that to be with her and to imitate her would help me greatly."

"God will grant it to you, dear, if He thinks good, and I trust He may; in the meantime, try to confide fully in His love to you, think how He has loved you all your life."

"But I am so unworthy of it all, and of Hélène too. I know I am often cold when you teach me, and it is all I can do sometimes to care about what Nadine and Aimée talk of now they are happy," said she, with a grateful little squeeze of Madame Bereti's arm. "I am afraid I care too much for myself and too little for others, but you will help me to get over this and to please God."

"My dear child, He who gives you the wish will help you to fulfil it, and you shall indeed find that his yoke is easy and his burden light. Yes, I believe you are right; you are too much occupied with yourself, and it is a difficulty, because your sisters are too young to be your companions; yet we must try to care much for what in-

terests others, for that will make us more useful and much pleasanter than we should otherwise be. But we must call Nadine and Aimée, and go home."

"Will you let me talk to you again in this way?"

A fond kiss was the reply given to her, and a fervent thanksgiving went up that night from Madame Bereti's little chamber at this answer to her anxious prayers. Vera recovered by degrees, and when Madame Bereti saw again depression or apathy creeping over her, she found some new employment for her, or begged her to sing, "He shall feed His flock."

The summer, with its resources of bathing, fishing, and woodland roving, was passing rapidly. Svetlana had come over to see the children once or twice,

and had announced Miss Rodney's departure for St. Petersburgh, when one day she came to invite Vera to go with her to Odessa for sea-bathing.

This invitation placed Madame Bereti in a very awkward and unpleasant position. Hélène had strictly charged her not to let her pupils go *anywhere* without her; she had even specified not to Svetlana's house—for she knew that her sister was by no means a sedate person, and considered her too young herself to have the charge of children only a few years her juniors. The General, too, was at this time away. He had accepted the command of Kasan, and was gone to inspect the Government House before moving his family thither. Madame Bereti was obliged consequently

to refuse Svetlana's request, and that lady, to her no small annoyance, declared she would ask Vera herself.

Vera thanked her sister, but declined.

Svetlana thereupon accused her of being afraid, laughed at her as a bookworm, and finally declared she knew Madame Bereti had exceeded her powers, and had even influenced Vera surreptitiously.

To these accusations Vera calmly replied,

"No, Svetlana, Madame Bereti has full instructions from Hélène what to do, and full powers to act for herself if anything unforseen occurs. I have not spoken to her since you told her of your plan. I like it very much. I am not such a coward or such a bookworm

as to like staying here better than going with you. But don't be angry, I *must* obey Hélène, you know."

"Who told you of 'the full powers'?" sneered Svetlana.

"Hélène, in one of her letters."

"Let me see it—I do not believe it."

Vera coloured, but went to fetch the letter.

"So it is true!" exclaimed Svetlana. "I did not expect she would fetch it. Well, Madame Bereti has certainly given Vera more *ton* and bearing than she had before—more spirit and dignity. I will go and tell her so before I start."

She accordingly ran into the school-room, and, full of real good-nature, told Madame Bereti what she thought, and very nearly all she had said of her;

but, checking herself in time, she turned quickly to Vera, who brought her the letter.

"Oh, you silly little girl, I do not want it. Sit up, Nadine,"—giving her a poke, whilst the rebellious shoulders of that young lady became still rounder; "why, Aimée, what a frock, all over ink! you ought not to escape a whipping for that; Madame Bereti is too indulgent. Good-bye!"

And off she started, too quickly to hear that it was Nadine, not Aimée, who had spilled the ink over her sister's frock and her own exercise. This was not merely an accident; for a pedlar had called, and was displaying his goods in the maids' room, when Antonina came to ask if the young ladies wished to buy anything. Refusing to do so, they went

on with their lessons; but on Madame Bereti's going into Vera's room to hear her read Italian, Nadine left her place and ran to the door, which she had hardly reached when she heard some one approach; whereupon, running back, she upset the long form of the desk she shared with Aimée, and the shock caused the ink-bottle to roll down over the copybook and the frock of her sister.

"Who put the ink-stand out of its proper place?" asked Madame Bereti.

"Nadine," promptly replied Aimée; and not disclaiming this on inquiry, when she had merited greater blame, she was ordered, by way of punishment, to write her exercise again.

"Are you not going to lock me up?" asked she, when she saw the ligne,

which was to take her sisters to a bath, at the door.

Madame Bereti looked surprised.

"Certainly not," she said, "I should be ashamed to do so at your age, or, in fact, at any age after six years old. If your task should be finished before we return you may go into the garden and order supper on the gymnastic ground, if it keeps fine."

The bathers mounted the ligne — a sort of Irish car, very long and large, capable of holding four, six or eight people on each side — and drove off.

Nadine looked around her: every door and window was open; there was no attempt at confinement, but she felt bound in honour not to move till she had finished her task—nay, even when

Antonina came to tempt her with the pedlar's pretty things, and told her that he had wonderful bargains, and was just going to pack them up, but would wait for her or bring them into the schoolroom, Nadine firmly refused to have anything to say to him.

Antonina laughed.

"It is not as it was last May," said she. "Well, well, the bird that is full of play in the spring is full of care in the summer. You are not locked in, why do you not do as you please?"

"Antonina," Nadine began angrily, but she stopped herself. "Antonina," she said, "don't make me angry—I was very naughty indeed in May, and now I want to be as good as Svetlana Nicolaievna."

"Oh, ho!" laughed Antonina, "now

may all the saints hear you, Nadejda Nicolaievna — you must leap over the river backwards then."

"Do go — get along!" cried Nadine, throwing a book at her, "and let me write quietly."

The book fell far short of Antonina, as it was intended to do, but being an unbound one it came to pieces in the fall.

Antonina picked it up and laid it on the desk.

"I shall say nothing," she observed: "the cow has a long tongue, but she does not speak, and I am like her."

"Very well, clever little brown cow," said Nadine, now quite restored to good humour; "but I shall tell for myself. Stay, go and order supper under the trees."

Nadine had finished her lessons, put on her gymnastic dress, and was arranging some flowers on the supper-table, when she heard, as she supposed, the ligne return.

But she was mistaken; it was a carriage full of visitors: Dmitri Georgevich, Tais Georgevna, Ta Dmitrivna, and their aunt the Countess C——. What should she do? Her first thought was to escape to the rocky banks of the lake and hide, or to change her dress, and beg them to wait; but even while she was hesitating, the visitors had followed Vacili; and little Ta running forward with her nurse exclaimed, "Oh, Nadine Nadeishka Nadejdinka!"

Flight was impossible, and Nadine, with the native grace and self-possession of a true Russian girl, came forward, apologized

for her sister's absence, and invited the company either to sup with her, or to drink tea under the trees, while she showed them some gymnastic performances.

The tea was accepted, and when they were all well supplied, Nadine ran to a cord depending from a pole sixteen feet high, and began climbing, hand over hand and foot over foot, as sailors do. This ascent accomplished, she slid slowly to the ground, leapt over the leaping-horse, vaulted over the vaulting stool, ran along a smooth narrow trunk of a tree raised some feet from the ground, performed a variety of other feats, and finally challenged Tais to a swinging match with her, and to a race round the Pas de Géant.

The magnificent Countess laughed, and

enjoyed her tea and the exhibition, which was not over when the other little girls arrived.

The whole party then did ample justice to the hot sernikie, cutlets, and cool cucumber, and melons, provided for the supper under the trees.

The guests shortly after retired to repose, when Nadine said her lessons which she had learnt very correctly; but the unfortunate book was discovered just where it was left, though Antonina in telling how it had got there did not mention at all the rudeness of her little lady. Her violence, however, could not be altogether denied; but as she herself confessed it, and had to pay for binding the book, no more would have been said, had there not been also some ink upon it, of which Aimée, to whom the

volume belonged, wished to make a new grievance; Antonina however interposed—

"No, no, Liubov Nicolaievna, I beg your pardon, you did that yourself in the morning; do not you remember when I was dusting the next room, I passed by you and saw you take the inkstand out of its hole and tilt it up on the desk —I showed you that some drops of ink were on the desk—I saw you put the book down in the same place directly afterwards, before I could wipe the place, and you sent me away to get some apricots for breakfast."

"Nonsense, Antonina!" cried Aimée, alarmed.

"It is now quite clear to me," said Madame Bereti, "that Nadine is not to blame for this mishap. Go to bed,

Aimée, and no one shall speak to you an unnecessary word to-morrow."

Aimée went very sulkily to bed; her character gave Madame Bereti far more anxiety than that of either of her sisters. Nadine's was impulsive and generous; Vera's tender and elevated; but Aimée was not so much ruled by her affections, as by her interests. The less noble nature had been the most injured by injudicious severity, and was the slowest to recover under a more just and gentle rule. Then, too, it must be admitted that her father and elder sisters, whenever they were at home, did her much harm, by sometimes begging that she might be pardoned for real offences, and at other times scolding her violently for mere trifles.

Just at present they were not at home,

and the visitors, therefore, did not stop long, but left Tais behind, at Vera's special request, and to Madame Bereti's great satisfaction, for she thought the society of that little girl would be very useful to Vera.

The summer days were now shortening, the harvests were gathered in, the second crops almost ready for the sickle, the ceremony of storing up the fruits and honey of the year had been performed on the 6th (18th) August, and the approach of autumn was already felt, when the General returned, and announced his intention of purchasing a beautiful estate near Kazan, and conveying his family there, in the course of another year. In the meantime he said, that, having often to visit his new estate, he should be frequently absent from

Garasavka, yet should leave the house full of company. Invitations were therefore sent out to his neighbours, and amongst them Viatcheslav, Dmitri, and Tais were the first on the list.

By the middle of September, however, the house was again empty, and the General absent on a hunting expedition in his other domains in the south. Gymnastics and pic-nics now succeeded to walking and riding excursions. The little girls and Madame Bereti were alone, but very happy and friendly together, and Vera's cheerfulness had not flagged, though she was deprived of the society of Tais.

Younger than Nadine, this little girl's mind, trained by early suffering, and by witnessing suffering in others, was almost as much developed as that of Vera; and though she had been less

carefully brought up, she had been so much the companion of her brother Dmitri, that he, without intending it, had formed her tastes and opinions upon his own.

He seemed, indeed, to become more and more attached to her, and to delight, even for her sake, in the visits to Garasavka, which had at first, by withdrawing him from his secluded and melancholy habits, been very painful to him.

Viatcheslav, too, seemed to find Garasavka a pleasant resort, and was always riding or driving over to see if the General was returned, though when there he was much more addicted to the walking than to the hunting parties.

CHAPTER X.

SEPTEMBER was in its full autumnal glory, when the children entreated Madame Bereti to give them a fête in the woods on Nadine's Saint's-day, the 17th (29th); and she consented to do so, if the weather should be fine, and they could start early enough to spend the whole day in the beautiful groves of Berosivka, or "linden bowers."

They agreed to take Antonina, Zenobia, Vacili and Boris, with them, and to ask Tais to join them at their rendezvous.

On the morning in question the sun rose in a mist, and Antonina calling her young mistresses later than they had desired, assured them that it would rain all day. This vexed the little girls, Nadine especially, and it was certainly needless to announce misfortunes so early.

But this was not all. Boris, who usually sent in the breakfast at seven o'clock, delayed it this morning, and when it was at last ready excused himself from attending by saying he was too ill to do any work, or to accompany the party in their excursion.

"Poor fellow," said Vera, "let us send the doctor to him; his day of rest will be the more complete from our being all out."

Happily the clouds dispersed, and

the sun broke out; provisions for the pic-nic were put into the telega, and the party ascended the rechecle—but Zenobia was not ready.

At last, looking very sulky, she appeared and asked leave to stay at home, as she had work she said to do for Svetlana Nicolaievna.

"No, no," said Vera, "I will excuse you that. Come, it is Nadejda Nicolaievna's fête-day."

Off they rolled at last: the day was bright, the sun just warm enough, and the country exhibited all the rich golden hues of autumn waning into winter.

"Do you believe," said Vera, to Madame Bereti, "in these rumours of revolt among the people? They say the Emperor has been fired at, and

that a general rising is expected; but I do not fear it now that the emancipation of the serfs is being effected so gradually."

"Has it been effected at all yet?"

"I thought so—indeed, felt sure of it; it has been so long talked of."

"Are your own people freed yet."

"No, they came to papa in a body and begged him to take care of them still. He told them he could not alter the laws, but that, if they liked it, he would make the change easier to them by giving everyone of fifteen who could read and write his freedom. At the same time he opened large schools, to which they resorted in crowds, in every one of his villages. As soon as under the expressed condition anyone of his peasants claims this freedom he gives

him a portion of land, with full liberty to follow trades, or to work as a journeyman, paying for this property and these privileges at the rate of twenty-five rubles a-year."

"And if they cannot do this?"

"They always can, by working for him — at least, now that the *corvée* is abolished, those that are freed can. Papa loses a great deal, of course, but it is for a great good, he says, and it is safer than risking all by a general emancipation."

"But I hear that few are as wise as the General?"

"Viatcheslav has promised his father to do the same, and Dmitri is thinking of it; but here we are, and here they are!" said she, jumping out of the ligne to greet her friends.

The hours flew rapidly by. The dinner

not very well dressed, owing to Boris' illness, was nevertheless gaily enjoyed; and the servants were demolishing its remnants, when the sky clouded over, low murmurs of thunder were heard, and a few drops of rain fell.

Dmitri, alarmed for Tais, who was very delicate, immediately took leave, and advised the rest of the party to move homeward also.

Madame Bereti gave the orders to that effect, but told the servants to finish their repast first. Whilst waiting, Vera and she took a little turn together, and Nadine and Aimée wandered off under the trees. The thunder increased and the lightning became vivid.

"Let us come away from the trees," said Madame Bereti. "Zenobia, call the young ladies."

But the young ladies, true to their gymnastic propensities, were half way up a tree, while the cooking fire was still burning close by. Zenobia gave her message churlishly, for nothing had softened her ill-humour.

"I don't believe it," said Nadine, "'tis your own invention."

"I don't believe it," said Aimée; "but what a flash!"

She grew white with terror, and could not stir.

Nadine would not.

Zenobia, irritated, caught up a long brand from the fire and threatened them with it. Nadine thereupon broke off a small bough of the tree, and gave her a smart blow on the hand. The brand, in consequence, fell against Aimée's muslin frock, which was immediately in a blaze.

The other servants and Vera were already at the ligne, but Madame Bereti, seeing the storm increase, had left Vera, and come to call the children herself. She arrived just in time to wrap Aimée in the shawl on her arm, lift her blazing out of the tree, and, having smothered the flame, to carry her senseless with fright off to the carriage.

Meanwhile Nadine, storming against Zenobia, and still striking at her, lost her balance, and fell heavily to the ground. The servant was wringing her hands over her when Madame Bereti returned, and, saying, "she is not much hurt, only stunned for a moment, help me to carry her," brought her also in to the ligne.

As there was a village not far off, she took Aimée there to have her burns

examined, and to get her own likewise looked to — for she had suffered almost as much as the child she had rescued from a frightful death.

It was necessary to do this, as the doctor attached to the family was absent with the General, his assistant only remaining behind. Thus Vera and Madame Bereti, each supporting a prostrate child, drove off.

Nadine did not recover her senses for a long time. Aimée was conscious, but frightened and in great pain. The doctor was not at home, so they were obliged to carry her on to Garasavka.

The injuries she had sustained were considerable, and though in no danger of disfigurement, she was very ill for several days. Both the girls were put to bed on reaching home. Nadine had

opened her eyes, but closed them again with a shudder on seeing Aimée's pale face. Her lips were parched, and her hands burning.

On Madame Bereti's approach, she buried her head in her pillow. But the governess's kind voice and words soon melted the poor girl, and she flung herself into the arms which closed around her, saying,

"Oh! do scold me! Is Aimée worse?"

"No; she is better now. She will, I trust, be much better soon."

"Oh! but I might have—" she wouldn't go on.

"You might, my poor child, but God saved you both."

"Let us thank his mercy!"

She knelt, still clasping Nadine's

hands in her own, and thanked God earnestly.

"We must have a *Te Deum* to-morrow," she said, rising; "and if you are well enough, you shall go to it."

"But that is not all, Nadine—let this sad day be the last that ever sees you give way to passion."

"My saint's day!" sighed Nadine.

"Think, dearest, how unlike such saints we are, when we give way to anger, clamour, and violence. But I won't say any more to-night. God bless and comfort you!"

Nadine had not yet wept, and though words of sympathy had calmed her, she did not look likely to weep at present. Madame Bareti sat therefore beside her, and bathed her burning forehead; the

look of anguish had not yet left the poor girl's eyes—the expression of pain yet remained in her countenance; and it grieved her warm-hearted governess to see that young face so changed, though she knew that her sorrow would have the most salutary effects. She was glad, however, that Nadine's positive sufferings allowed her to be more tender and soothing in her manner, than strict justice might otherwise have permitted; and she hoped to be able to give peace to the mind, while tending the bodily ills of her dear little pupil.

While thus engaged, she heard a light step in the next room; it was Vera, who had come to inquire after Aimée.

"Do tell me," she said, "is it true, that you saved Aimée?"

"I wrapped her in a shawl," said

Madame Bereti, quietly. "But go to bed, dear Vera, after this trying day."

"May I just look at Nadine?"

"I think you had better not. Poor Nadine is very feverish and unhappy, and I want her to get some sleep; if she sees you she will be so excited!"

"Poor Nadine! Zenobia says it was she who did it."

"Partly, and accidentally only. Poor child, she is suffering terribly for it now."

And Vera went into her room.

Nadine's illness and feverishness increased rapidly, so rapidly that she thought herself and Aimée to be dying, and clung to Madame Bereti, crying out delirously, that she had killed both herself and her sister.

Hearing this, Madame Bereti lost no

time in applying leeches to her temples, and, while the blood was flowing, saw her eyes open, and a mournful look of repentance and sorrow replace one of wild despair. As Madame Bereti bound up her head, she kissed her tenderly, and whispered that Aimée was much better, and that Vera had asked to see her.

This brought tears for the first time down Nadine's cheeks, which gave her great relief, and a refreshing sleep quickly followed.

Madame Bereti sat by her till she saw her weary swollen eyelids close, and the tired little frame heave with the deep drawn breathings of a soft and healing slumber.

Madame Bereti had now time to examine and pay some attention to

the injuries she had received herself. Her chest and arms were much burnt, but happily her hands, which she had needed so much, had escaped. A few dressings, however, cured her wounds completely. As for Aimée, she was in great pain for many days; but Nadine awoke late the next morning quite free from fever.

Madame Bereti, however, kept her in bed, as a precaution, and tried to lead her to speak of what had occurred.

The poor girl was indeed stricken to the heart.

"Oh!" said she, "I thought I was very wicked once before, my heart was so full of evil thoughts; but now, with no temptation, I have been far worse. Oh! if you had not come—if Aimée had been burnt to death!"

She hid her face in saying this on Madame Bereti's shoulder.

"It was not *that*, dear, that would have made you more guilty, and you are no worse now than if your blow had hurt only poor Zenobia. You know your passion, your *sin*, would have been the same if no consequences had followed; though awful it is to think that you might have been the cause of your sister's death! Nevertheless, we must not, for that reason, think *this* act of passion and disobedience worse than others of the same nature."

Nadine looked up at her earnestly.

"Do you really mean that?"

"I do. The fault is in the *beginning*, not the *end*, of our actions. If we judge them by their effects, we shall never judge rightly. Yet such a vice as anger

is dreadful—for this very reason, that it makes us do that which we have no intention of doing; and we may thus, in a moment, be guilty of terrible crime, and the cause of terrible misfortunes!"

"Do you know," said Nadine, "I felt quite afraid to speak to you of it last night—I felt afraid to pray."

"And when you did confess to God and to me what you were suffering, you felt better?"

"Oh, much! I always will. Do you know, I did a very wicked thing once, though I did not think it so then, and I am not sure that you know it. May I tell it to you?"

Encouraged to do so, she confessed the whole tale of her flight, and added:—

"And that is why Viatcheslav comes

here so often, and Dmitri looks at me so seriously, and does not like me; he says, 'Ah! you are the heroine, are you not?'"

Madame Bereti was not quite of the same opinion about the sentiments of Viatcheslav and Dmitri, but she said nothing, and Nadine continued :—

"I was always afraid of your knowing it; and thought you would dislike me also, and think it of no use to do anything with me"—and her eyes overflowed with tears—"but now I like you to know everything." And she pressed herself more closely to Madame Bereti's bosom, who, stooping fondly over her, said, as she kissed her,

"It would take a great deal to make me leave off loving you very dearly, and hoping to see you, with God's help and

blessing, become good, and wise, and gentle, my dear little Nadine."

Madame Bereti then retired into her own room to repose herself a little; for the anxieties of the last four-and-twenty hours had been almost too much for her strength; yet she thought, with soothing comfort, on the improvement that had taken place in Véra, and of the good the accident which had happened to Aimée might do to Nadine, of which the confession she had just heard was the first fruits. That most interesting little girl remained, for several days, very weak, touchingly humble, gentle, and most patient.

So great an improvement could not be expected to continue without interruption, yet it never wholly disappeared,

and Nadine's violence became a thing of the past at Garasavka. Its last great eruption, at least, took place at the autumnal festival of St. Nadejda's day, already recorded.

A report became current, on that occasion, through the villages and neighbourhood, that the children had been struck by lightning. Zenobia, who was sent off with her work to Svetlana's house the next day, and who owed a grudge to Madame Bereti, because this removal separated her from Boris, put about the following version of what happened at the fête. According to her, the children were quarrelling and fighting with each other with lighted brands, when the vengeance of God struck them with a thunderbolt, and the injustice of

man struck her, a bystander, with dismissal from her place.

At about this time, too, the intendant of the General found disturbances and discontents becoming very rife. Murmurs about servitude and "emancipation" met him on all sides, and though, when the General returned, he found his little girls well and happy, he was assailed with complaints; and Boris unluckily choosing that moment to ask leave to marry, and being refused, became one of the worst murmurers—an enemy in the very camp.

Three or four weeks however of the General's steady mild rule and benevolent presence reduced all to external peace and order, and he determined on dismissing his Russian house servants,

and hiring Poles or Germans in their stead, in order to emancipate his serfs in one batch. This measure was soon put in process of accomplishment. Boris was among the first to be freed, and, as he was an intelligent fellow, his master offered to send him to Kazan, there to get employment or to set up a shop, as he liked best. He asked again upon this to be allowed to marry. His master said he had already refused, but as he was going away, and he might feel the separation severely, he would no longer withhold his consent.

The wedding consequently was promptly celebrated, and Boris and his wife started for Kazan. His wife, however, was not Zenobia, but Antonina! And Zenobia, feeling herself aggrieved, became

more than ever insubordinate, and was soon the centre of a little band of rebellious spirits, who were constrained only by fear from an open outbreak.

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